
ALL IN
A GARDEN FAIR

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ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR

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ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR

The Simple Story of Three Boys and a Girl

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE FIRST VOLUME.

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ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR.

INTRODUCTION.

THE PRIZE OF THE GOLDEN APPLE.

If the months of the year are feminine, like the fleeting hours, then the most feminine, the most variable, the greatest coquette of the whole twelve, is that nymph whom we call May—*fol qui s'y fie.* She is inconstant; she never remains of the same mind; she is faithless; she is full of whims; sometimes she is so sweet and charming that she carries all hearts, not by savage assault, but by the mere aspect and sight of her. Sometimes she is so full of smiles and winning ways that men, looking upon each other, wonder how any could be found to speak a word in her dispraise; she sings, and laughs,

and crowns herself with flowers, and trips with light foot and careless ease over meadows ankle-deep with buttercups. During these her happy moods we all fall to being happy too; every poet thinks of rhymes to fit a sonnet; every musician reaches down his fiddle; and everywhere there is such a twanging of lyres, singing of madrigals, dancing of ballads, warbling of ditties, and universal chorus of praise, that it is enough to turn the head of any goddess, to say nothing of a mere minor deity and simple country nymph. And all in a moment—lo!—she changes; she frowns; she is cold; she sings no longer; she puts on sad-coloured robes; she is as forbidding as poor Miss February with her sealskins, her red nose her frozen toes, and the cold in her head. Alas! poor May. Then the lyre, the theorbo, the viol, the bagpipe, the scrannel straw, the lute, the dulcimer, tabor, and pipe are all, with one consent, silenced and put upon the shelves; the musicians sit down, sad; the poets tear up their unfinished lays; the songs cease; every-

body goes home; doors and windows are shut tight, and the poor maid is left out of doors all in the cold, deploring, alone in her gloom to lament her caprice. Yet another hour, and she forgets her ill-humour: we forget it too: she is once more the sweet, the lovely, the blushing, merry, and merry-making month of May; we are grovelling slaves again.

It was in the evening of, perhaps, the most lovely day that this fickle goddess ever vouchsafed to England that four children were playing together under the trees of an ancient forest. The sun was going down, and the west was already making preparations to receive him with a grand illumination. The young leaves were at their bravest and brightest, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of the May blossom, because there is no such place in the world as this forest for the hawthorn. Three of the playing children were boys of thirteen, the fourth was a girl of about eleven. She ran, and jumped, and played with the boys as if she were a boy herself, being, in fact, as

strong and sturdy as any boy of her age, with a length of limb which gave goodly promise for the future, to those who love their mistress and queen to be tall. They had been running and playing the whole afternoon and were now growing a little tired. When a boy begins to feel tired he jumps and runs harder than ever, and becomes rough, just to show that he is not tired at all. But when a girl feels tired she wants to sit down. Presently, therefore, this young lady, who had been, all day long, sunshine and mirth, grew a little cross, and began to cry fie upon the boys for their rough handling, a fault which besets and spoils their sex, and to say severely that she wished there were no such things as boys, and that they ought not to have been invented—yet conscious all the time that she preferred boys to girls as playfellows—and that she should play no longer, but should leave them to bang each other with their shoulders and their elbows. The sky, in fact, became cloudy and the wind chill.

So she walked away, dangling her hat by

the strings, in the direction of a fallen trunk, on which sat a man, thoughtfully regarding the group, with his chin upon his hand, and a contemplative cigarette between his lips. He rose to meet the girl, and took both her hands in his and kissed her forehead. This was her father.

He was a little man, though his daughter looked as if she would be tall; yet not a very little man. His narrow sloping shoulders—a feature one may remark more often in Paris than in London—his small head, and the neatness of his figure made him look smaller than he was. Small Englishmen—this man was a Frenchman—are generally sturdy and broad-shouldered, and nearly always grow fat when they reach the forties. But this was a thin man. In appearance he was extremely neat; he wore a frock-coat buttoned tightly; behind it was a white waistcoat; he had a flower in his buttonhole; he wore a pink and white necktie, very striking; his shirt-front and cuffs were perfect; his boots were highly polished; he was five-and-

forty, but looked thirty; his hair was quite black and curly, without a touch of white in it; he wore a small black beard; his eyes were also black and as bright as steel. It is perhaps misleading to compare them with steel, because it is always the villain whose eye glitters like steel. Now M. Hector Philipon was not a villain at all. By no means. The light in his eyes came from the kindness of his heart, not from any villainous aims or wicked passions, and, in fact, though his beard and his hair were so very black—black of the deepest dye, such as would have graced even a wicked uncle—he frightened nobody, not even strangers. And of course everybody in those parts knew very well that he was a most harmless and amiable person. He had a voice deep and full like the voice of a church organ; honey sweet too, as well as deep. And at sight of his little girl those bright eyes became as soft as the eyes of a maiden in love. When he spoke, although his English was fluent and correct, you perceived a foreign accent. But he had been so

long in the country and so far away from his own countrymen that the accent was slight. Yet he neither looked nor spoke like an Englishman.

'You are tired, Claire?'

'Not much, papa, but hot with so much running. And the boys began to push.'

She sat beside him, laying her hand upon his arm. Already they were companions, this little girl and her father. Presently there arose a great shouting of the boys; a cloud fell upon the girl's brow, because they had learned already to play *without her*, and in half a minute she was forgotten. It was a very white brow over a face which might become beautiful. As yet, no one except a prophet (of whom there are lamentably few nowadays, and those few have their hands full of other things) could say anything about the child but that she was singularly like her father, only, a very uncommon thing, she had deep blue eyes, with dark eyebrows and black hair. This combination, so far as one can learn, happens

nowadays hardly anywhere except in Tasmania, where it has been accounted for on various scientific grounds, such as, that the soil is strongly impregnated with phosphate—a thing in itself quite sufficient to account for anything; and that the air is remarkably charged with ozone—what cannot ozone effect?—and that the proximity of the South Pole will account for everything not previously explained. All these reasons are excellent, and enable us to see quite satisfactorily why Tasmanian ladies get black hair and blue eyes. But they do not apply to Mademoiselle Claire, because she never was in Tasmania, and, I believe, is not likely to go there. The question why she got blue eyes and black hair may therefore be referred to the Royal Society.

She looked at them wrestling and running, just as happily without her as with her, regretfully. She had thought, perhaps, that they would follow her and sit down on the trunk beside her, and refuse to play any longer because she would play no longer. At least,

she did not think that they would go on just as if she were not in existence. Boys are truly horrid creatures. They are born with none of the finer shades. And neglect is the greatest insult one human being can offer to another. Presently she slipped off her seat upon the trunk and opened the lid of a basket. They had been having a little inconsiderable picnic, a cheap picnic, with cold tea in a bottle, and bread and butter, and bread and honey, and a little fruit. The bottle was empty, and the bread and butter and honey were all eaten up. But there was lying, in the corner, the last of the oranges.

She took it out.

'Papa,' she said, 'shall the boys race for it?'

'They shall,' replied her father. 'We will finish with a race. Boys,' he shouted, 'we will finish with a race—Claire holds the prize. The course shall be—what? Then, mark it out for yourselves.'

He looked on with a smile, which was not

the smile of benevolence, or of affection, or of good manners, or of condescension, or of interest or anticipation, because he really did not care about the excitement of the race at all, but of philosophy. He smiled, because he remarked the little coquetry of his daughter and the emulation of the boys.

As for Claire, the sunshine returned to her face, the sky was clear again, the wind was warm; the boys were going to fight for her gifts; any woman at any age appreciates this discernment of beauty. Her eyes were bright and her black locks were blown across her face. The boys meanwhile, as if a kingdom depended on the result, measured the ground, pacing side by side. When they were quite satisfied that they had got an exact two hundred yards they stood in a line awaiting the signal.

'She holds,' murmured M. Philipon, 'the gift of the golden apple. This was long ago the cause of discord, and she is happy because she has it to bestow. Instead of three god-

desses I see three schoolboys; instead of a shepherd there is a girl. Why does one think of Paris? Yet they will all grow up, and perhaps some day the golden apple will be a golden ring, and aha! Claire, my angel, thou wilt be worth many golden apples. Are you ready, brave boys? Ready all? Go!'

When he dropped his handkerchief the lads started with a rush. The biggest and tallest of them took the lead and kept it. He was closely pressed by a slighter-built boy, who promised to make a good second; long behind these two toiled the third, who was of shorter frame and ran as if he were in bad condition, panting laboriously yet not giving in.

'Will wins,' said the philosopher. 'Happy boy! he is born to win everything. The world is his, because he is strong and brave and not too clever. Those arrive—Hein?—who are not so much cleverer than their neighbours. To have too many ideas is to be *incompris*, uncomprehended; no one understood my ideas

when I was young. The world belongs to Will. No! he loses! the boy with many thoughts wins—no—it is over—they are even. Now, in the big race which may come afterwards, to whom would the girl bestow the prize? An orange or an apple may be divided in halves, but a woman? No; she is like the Republic, One and Indivisible.'

In fact the race seemed in the first boy's hands; he was ten clear feet ahead, there were but twenty feet between him and the girl, who clapped her hands and cried out; he turned to laugh at the second: it was a sad example of pride before a fall; his foot caught in a tuft of grass and he was grassed. He was up in a moment, but he was already overlapped, and although he made up the difference it was a dead heat, and they were in neck and neck.

The third boy continued the race long after it was hopeless, and came in with a smiling and satisfied face.

The Frenchman patted this boy on the head approvingly.

'You did well,' he said. 'Never know that you are beaten. Then you will always feel the pride of victory. My daughter, divide the prize into four portions and give Olinthus one of the quarters.'

'I was winning easily,' cried the tallest lad. He was as handsome a boy as you may wish to see anywhere, with clear, fresh complexion and brave outlook; a lad of mettle who liked fair fighting and the rigour of the game; a boy with plenty of ability, as was shown by his broad forehead and clear-cut nostril, yet perhaps without the yearning for books which makes a scholar and a writer.

'Ha! ha!' laughed the other. 'So you were, Will; I own that. All the better for me that you fell down.'

'All fair, Allen. But it is a beastly sell.'

Allen laughed again. He was a much handsomer boy, but his face wanted the strength that lay in the other's; his eyes were full and light, his lips were mobile, his forehead was high rather than broad.

Claire hesitated between the two. While she hesitated Will took the prize out of her hand.

'We will divide it,' he said, 'as your father orders. And Tommy shall have his quarter.'

'The prizes of life, my sons,' observed M. Philipon, sententiously—he really was a most profound philosopher, and so long as he could say what seemed a good thing was careless whether or no it was new—'the prizes of life are bestowed, not at random, as foolish people think, but by fixed rules; they are not given to the men who run fastest, but to those who run most wisely. Combine, Will, prudence with swiftness. Then doubt not the issue, but run with courage. As for Olinthus——'

'Tommy was out of it from the beginning,' said Will, interrupting in the truthful but brutal manner common among boys.

'If it had been a three-mile, or even a one-mile course,' said Tommy, 'you fellows would have seen—as for your little hundred-yard races, it is only a rush. Give me a long course.'

'As for Olinthus,' continued M. Philipon, 'let him continue to run bravely, short course or long course, and many prizes will be his.'

Olinthus, commonly called Tommy, blushed to the roots of his hair. Nobody noticed this proof of modesty, because his face was already so red from the running that no amount of blushes could have deepened that hue. It was a blush absolutely wasted. At a later age, when blushes are rare, this might have caused subsequent regret. Who would not wish to retain that blush which adorns the cheek of youth when good deeds come to light? Why, it is an incentive to good deeds. Titus blushed daily. But Tommy did not mind. He was, as I have said, short of figure and broad of shoulder, his legs were sturdy, his face broad and rather flat, and his nose was a little turned up at the end. Perhaps he was only a commonplace boy to look at. He who makes it the business of his pilgrimage to watch his fellow-men becomes something like a portrait painter, inasmuch as he finds no one common-

place. At fourteen a face, however plain, may mean a great many things—there are infinite possibilities in every young face on which history has not yet set a mark; at five-and-twenty the number of these possibilities begins to be counted; at forty there is a stamp upon it; at sixty there is the indelible seal of a life's history upon it. Tommy's face as yet was the face of possibility, and to ordinary observers its range, so to speak, was limited. Yet you shall see to what heights this Tommy subsequently rose.

When they had eaten their orange Claire packed up the basket, and they all began to stroll homewards. By this time the sun had disappeared and the evening was upon them.

First walked the girl between Will and Olinthus, and they all three chattered together and pretended to know everything. Boys of thirteen are encyclopædias of information; like the great mediæval scholars, they know all that there is to know; or, which is exactly the same thing, they know all that they talk about, from the

hyssop to the oak, and from Bunny to Behemoth.

M. Philipon walked behind with Allen.

When the sun had quite gone down, there fell upon the forest an awful sense of the mysterious deepening twilight. The three who led the way took hands and dropped into silence; only now and then Tommy shouted, just to keep up his spirits and to show that the more awful the outward look of things, the higher his courage rose. Allen was perfectly silent, and presently his companion saw that his eyes were wide open, luminous, gazing steadily before him, yet seeing nothing, and his lips parted. He watched the boy awhile, then spoke softly.

'Boy, shall I tell your thoughts?'

The boy started and laughed; he was called back to himself.

'If you can, sir.'

'When the sun sank behind the trees, your courage fell; you became sad; you began to long for something; you expected something.

Now the wind is like a voice to you, but you do not know what it says; the trees beckon to you with long arms, but you do not know why; beneath the branches in the deep blackness are caves filled with things wonderful and mysterious; you would wish to penetrate these dark caverns and fight the devils which hide there, but you do not know how to begin, nor where to begin.'

The boy interrupted him.

'How do you know, sir?'

'Because, my son, I too have been a boy. There are some boys with whom their dreams linger; mostly they die away and are forgotten. There are other boys, but not many, whose dreams take shape and live in words. Perhaps you may be one of these boys. Who knows?'

'And yet,' he said to himself, 'I suppose there will be nothing for it but the *petit commis* —the little clerk. Poor boys! The pity of it!'

PART I.

THE MAKING OF A MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLAGE GREEN.

All the houses of the village stand along one side of a broad road which leads, like all other roads, to London and to Rome. It is not a high-road, and has but little traffic. It is only a road which connects one small town with another small town—Romford, in fact, with Chipping Ongar. When the road was constructed there was so much ground to spare that they did not trouble about breadth, and allowed to remain a belt of grass twenty, thirty, or forty feet wide on the side of it. The houses of the village vary in size from the great square villa set in a great square garden, to the little cottage of four rooms built of planks painted white, with a high pointed gable and porch

overgrown with jessamine. Naturally, because we always have the poor with us, there are more small cottages than there are great villas. If there were any ragged children they would use the green side of the road for a playground; but there are none, for this is not a country village at all, but a suburban village. On the green, in place of the children, you may see when the day is fine certain elderly gentlemen walking together: it is their Exchange, their boulevard, their place for conversation.

One summer morning, about half-past eight or nine o'clock, there were three of these *habitués* already out upon the green.

Two of these were standing together in the shade of the tree: one, Sir Charles Withycomb, ex Lord Mayor of London, was a little old gentleman with a short nose and white hair, a ruddy cheek and a twinkling eye, a cheerful face and a ready smile—an old gentleman who might not be very wise, but who was certainly kind of heart. The one who stood beside him was tall and thin, with a long white beard, and

—which you observed when he took off his hat —a head as bald as an egg. He had a stoop in his shoulder which gave him a deferential manner, and he rubbed his hands and bowed his head when he spoke, which increased the appearance of deference to superior judgment. His name was Skantlebury. The third, Mr. Colliber, was somewhat younger, but grey-headed too. He was sharp and thin of face, with a hooked nose and the eye of a bird of prey. He lacked the kindly expression of Sir Charles, and looked angry and hungry. This was because he was both angry and hungry. He hungered after shares, bonds, coupons, consols, funds, stocks and quotations, which had been his daily food for many years. He was angry because he could get them no more. He was as angry and as hungry as a hawk before breakfast. He was walking up and down the green looking occasionally at the Money Market article in the paper which he carried in his hand. On passing the other two he would stop and exchange a word or two.

Presently there came from one of the lanes which led into the road a very neat and dapper little man, with shiny boots, buttoned frock, and a white waistcoat. In his button-hole was a sprig of jessamine. Beside him walked a little girl of twelve or so. On passing the gentlemen he raised his hat politely. Sir Charles acknowledged the salute with a friendly gesture.

'A worthy man,' he said, 'and lives, the butcher tells me, on a pound and a half of meat or thereabouts every week, and that not the prime cut. But, to be sure, he is a Frenchman. I wonder, Skantlebury, whether the French City Companies ever have a real banquet. I remember, in my Company—ah!'

There are some reminiscences better left unexpressed, because it is not in the power of words to do them justice. It is a cruel injustice that not a single poet has ever sung of a City Company's banquet. Wherefore worthy aldermen can only wag their heads and fall back upon an interjection.

Next there came running out of a cottage beside the green—one of the little white wooden cottages, with six rooms or so—a boy of thirteen or fourteen. As he passed the gentlemen he touched his hat respectfully, as a junior should. Sir Charles nodded kindly.

'A tall boy,' he said. 'Grows like his father: too much like his father. Who failed,' he added after a moment, because there was no hurry and they all knew the story, 'for a contemptible sum. Quite a contemptible sum.' He sighed and shook his head, but his face was so cheerful and his eyes so bright and his lips so red, that the butcher, looking out of his shop, thought Sir Charles was chuckling over some joke, and smiled in sympathy.

'In the silk trade, was he not?' asked Mr. Colliber, looking after him. 'There was money, once, in silk.'

'In the silk trade,' repeated Sir Charles. 'Though in a small way; and formerly in Brimage and Waring's. His partner got him into the mess. Name was Stephens, and he

bolted: yes, he got hold of all the money that he could and bolted. Then Engledew failed, and—I suppose because it was such a disgraceful thing to fail for such a trifle—he—he—in fact he was ashamed of it, and he hanged himself. But the boy knows nothing of that.'

'Lucky,' said Mr. Colliber, 'that some of us weren't troubled by the same scruples. Else we might be all hanging in a row.'

'There are differences, my dear friend,' said Sir Charles gently. 'My own failure was for a hundred and fifty thousand. Yours, Colliber, as all the world knows, for a colossal half-million. It is an event in history. It will not be forgotten. To fail for such an amount is glorious—glorious.'

His face, on which the sunshine seemed to linger, glowed with admiration at the thought of so much greatness. But Mr. Colliber only scowled, as if this greatness had been thrust upon him.

'The failures of the residents in this village,' said Mr. Skantlebury, rubbing his hands,

'amount in the aggregate, it has been computed, to more than a million and a quarter.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Colliber, with a snarl-like glimpse of white teeth; 'don't you wish you had failed yourself, Skantlebury?'

This was a cruel thing to say, because Mr. Skantlebury had, on the contrary, made money, though in quite a small way. To be almost the only man in the place who has not failed, and to have actually made a small fortune while all the rest have lost large fortunes, is a painful position for a man.

Mr. Skantlebury blushed and coughed behind his hand. The action was significant of the small way. It almost, taken with the roundness of his shoulders and the bowing of his head, suggested the retail way.

Sir Charles took no notice of this remark, and went on about the boy, although no one was listening.

'The boy's mother,' he said, 'was a Fool. Nobody but a Fool would have acted as she acted. She had some money of her own—

settled upon her and all—and she positively gave it up to the creditors! A pitiable business to see so much money clean thrown away. They took most of it, and left her a poor fifteen hundred or so. They live upon it.'

'De-plorable,' said Mr. Skantlebury.

Then there passed another boy running after the first, a lad with a strap and a bundle of books.

'Young Gallaway,' said Sir Charles. 'His father died too young. If he had lived he would have failed for a far larger amount. The Gallaways have been in the oil line for many years. That boy's uncle is a warm man. Oh! yes, a warm man; I remember he lost money by me.'

Sir Charles spoke as if the more this warm man had lost by him, the warmer he had become.

At the end of the green the two boys were joined by a third, and they all set off walking together as fast as they could.

'Young Massey,' said Mr. Skantlebury.

'Another case; his father, too——" said Mr. Colliber.

'Yes, oh! yes,' replied Sir Charles. 'A creditable failure. Seventy thousand only; but the circumstances were romantic. The failure happened two years before I was Lord Mayor.'

He then proceeded to describe circumstantially the way in which Mr. Massey dissipated a good business and became a bankrupt. Unfortunately, the particulars, of the greatest interest, are too long to be narrated here. It is sufficient to explain that Mr. Massey was one of those brilliant speculators who seek a fortune by shipping coals to Newcastle, sugar to Mauritius, rum to Jamaica, tea to China, or claret to Bordeaux: a man full of ideas. He tried to realise them, and the result was—that he came to the village.

'And they are pretty poor, too, I suppose?' asked Mr. Colliber.

'De-plorably,' replied Mr. Skantlebury, rubbing his hands again.

'If you want wealth,' said Sir Charles, 'you can go to Buckhurst Hill, or to Sydenham, or to Chislehurst: here you will not find it. But we have our pride.'

One would not grudge Sir Charles Withycomb his pride, because it afforded him so much solace; but in assuming that he and his friends were singular in its possession he was wrong, because pride is one of the things to which everybody is entitled: it is a right of man; it belongs to equality and fraternity; and so benevolently equal are the distribution of the choicest gifts in store, that a City waiter may be as proud as the City Remembrancer, and the ship's carpenter as proud as the purser.

'Some of us,' Sir Charles went on, 'have received distinctions from her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen; some of us have been on terms of familiarity with the great—yes, Mr. Colliber, have lived in Kensington Palace Gardens; some of us have been in a large way; we have failed, as my friend rightly says, for an aggregate of millions. I have myself enter-

tained his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. It was when I was Lord Mayor——'

Here Mr. Colliber moved slowly away.

'When I was Lord Mayor, Mr. Skantlebury. At the Mansion House. When he came away'—at this point of the well-known story Sir Charles's emotion always overcame him, to the absolute destruction of his aspirates, which had been acquired partially and at a comparatively late period—'when he came away his Royal 'Ighness said to me, "My Lord Mayor," he said, "I 'ope that every Lord Mayor that comes after you will entertain me as 'andsome as you 'ave entertained me 'andsome this night." He did, indeed, Mr. Skantlebury.'

'It must be a glorious recollection, Sir Charles,' said the only hearer left, 'glorious.' He rubbed his hands again and bowed his head as if he had heard the anecdote for the first time. Presently Mr. Colliber returned, and the group was joined by Mr. Massey, a large old gentleman with a rich voice and a dignified bearing, who appeared capable of failing for

millions. Then they talked about investments and consulted the share lists, and were as eager over it as if they were all going off without a moment's delay to invest the money for which they had failed.

There is not much money in this village, but there is continual talk of money, and the perilous ways of merchant adventurers are familiar to the residents. There is no hurried rush to the City in the morning, nor is there the slow return in the evening; their feet tread no more the golden pavement; yet they have been there and still would go; and in their eyes it is the nearest approximation to heaven below. There was once, I have read in the 'Penny Magazine,' a sailor who was too fond of rum. Everybody in the fleet, including the Admiral, Lord Nelson, took the greatest interest in this rare and exceptional case. It was finally decided that the only way to cure the patient was to give him nothing else to drink. The first day he was in happy heaven; sang all the songs he knew,

with many that he did not know; danced all the hornpipes he knew, with many steps which he only guessed; and smoked as much tobacco as can be smoked in a single day. The next morning he was no longer in heaven, but in purgatory. The next—but here we must leave him, the Admiral, Lord Nelson, and the fleet still looking on with increased interest. Now, as these gentlemen had been pursuing the shadow of wealth all the time they were in the City when they had money to play with, it was a kind of purgatory to them that they must pursue it still when they had none. People who are so unhappy or so wicked as to have actually become rich need not be considered in this story.

In fact the village reversed the proverb, because it showed how pride cometh after a fall, instead of before it. For the people who inhabited its cottages and trim villas had all, in fact, failed, wound up, made composition, or agreed with their creditors.

At first thought it seems strange that any village should be blessed with so great a distinction. Yet it is not really strange at all. For, if you think of it, every town must have some peculiarities. It may be placed on the Thames or on the Potomac, but it must be placed somewhere, else it would be worse off than a mathematical point, which at least hath position. Then it must have residents, else what sort of a town would it be? And the residents must have distinguishing marks—unless they are Chinamen, who are all alike over the whole Empire. We have, for instance, all heard of the one-eyed man in the city of the blind. Abdera, again, was a city where all, from young to old, were confessedly born fools—no doubt proud of their folly. Gotham (impudently annexed by the Americans) is a city, on the other hand, where they are all proud of their wisdom. Surely, therefore, there is nothing remarkable in a village—not a city, but a small village—occupied entirely by people who have broken down in the world. It would be strange, con-

sidering how many such there be, if there were no such village.

There was once an island in the neighbourhood of Byzantium whither they used to send deposed emperors, simply dressed in monastic garb, to live the rest of their lives on beans, lentils, and cold water. I have often pictured to myself the mingled sympathy and joy with which these unfortunates would welcome a new arrival. They would hold pleasing converse with him on the glories of the throne when they sat upon it. They would explain to him the true nobility of their own conduct, which mankind had basely misinterpreted; and they would ask of him, or exchange with him, credence as to the extraordinary purity of their own motives and the greatness of their reigns. Half-a-dozen of these old emperors sitting in a row, like old sailors on the Common Hard by Portsmouth Harbour, would be a truly delightful picture. One can imagine the stories they would tell about the greatness of their fall, the consolation they would derive from the

contemplation and recollection of this fall; and the flutter among the cowls when another boat was signalled having on board another deposed emperor. Such as this island, so was this village.

As for the men in this village, the ex-bankrupts and compounders, they were, as a rule, cheerful and chirpy. They had the Green to meet in on warm and sunny days. The past was filled with pleasing memories. They would compare notes on former splendours. They would persuade themselves that they were not quite forgotten in the City yet; in fact they were not, nor will they be, forgotten for a long time. Sir Charles might still hear very, very truthful things said about him. Mr. Colliber's name will still be received with the warmest blessings of those whom he has ruined, unto the third and fourth generation.

As for the ladies, the older ones found, like their husbands, consolation in memory. But it was bad for their daughters and for their sons; for lovers come not to this place. The

girls—there are not many—are as perfectly sure of a loveless life as Jephthah's daughter; they go about in despondency. When one thinks about these poor girls thus hidden away and kept out of sight of marrying man, one feels first, vaguely, that something ought to be done and must be done; and secondly, that there really should be held, some two or three times in the year, a Babylonian marriage market. We have got the Babylon all ready, and really I think there would not be much difficulty in getting an auctioneer and a steady supply of lots. And, after all, such a marriage would not be much more matter of chance than plenty that are celebrated every day.

Naturally, at first, the boys grew up to regard a big bankruptcy as a just cause for pride; they considered, for instance, that Whittington came short of solid greatness by dying in good credit; and they looked upon the great offices in the City as steps in the splendour of a career which would presently end in a failure

for hundreds of thousands. It was long before Allen and Will realised that this glory existed only in the eyes of the village. The truth was rudely brought home to them by contrast and comparison. They learned when they went to school that bankruptcy means poverty. Other boys—sons of less illustrious citizens—could have new clothes, while they had to endure patches in unseemly places, lettings down, additions of cuffs, and all kinds of makeshifts to keep on the old clothes as long as they held together. Other boys, again, could have plenty of books; they had to make one set of books do between them. Some books they had to borrow. There was scrimping in such small matters as pens, ink, and paper. They could not subscribe to the school club, and were thus cut off from full companionship, and they had no pocket-money at all. Poverty is nothing so long as it is not felt. It mattered little to be poor while the boys lived at home and did not go to school, because there was at least enough to eat and to drink. It was when they were able

to compare that the truth gradually became clear to them.

'It is all very well,' said Will at length, 'for a fellow to look forward to be like Sir Charles and Mr. Colliber. They failed for so much that they are grand; everybody here is proud of having been a bankrupt. But my father isn't grand at all. He says that if he hadn't failed I should have gone to Rugby and Cambridge. Very well, then, what is he so proud of it for? As for me, I don't intend to fail. I mean to make a fortune.'

'So do I,' said Allen.

'So do I,' said Tommy. 'My uncle is an oil broker in a large way; he'll give me a berth to begin with. You should see his house at Brixton. I mean to make money too. You should hear him order about his butler. We had champagne there last Christmas.'

The three boys were the only boys in the place, and an object of interest to the residents, who gave them advice in a paternal spirit, and sometimes, but seldom, sixpences.

'Stick to your books, boys,' said Sir Charles, 'stick to your books, especially your account books. They have made me, boys, what I am.' He puffed out his cheeks as he spoke, and Allen, though he regarded Sir Charles as the greatest of men, thought of the frog in the fable, while Will began to wonder whether it was the adding up of those books wrong which had made him what he was. 'They made your fathers, lads. Now which of you three is best in arithmetic?'

The other two pointed to Will, who blushed, but did not deny the accusation.

'Well,' said Sir Charles, 'I hope you are all good at figures. And what is your ambition, Will?'

'I shall try, sir, not to fail,' said the boy in his downright way.

Mr. Colliber laughed sarcastically, Sir Charles looked uncomfortable, Mr. Skantlebury coughed behind his hand.

'Ah! yes—good. And you, Olinthus?' asked Sir Charles.

'I shall try to be Lord Mayor of London, and when I fail it shall be for hundreds of thousands,' replied the ingenuous Tommy.

'A noble boy indeed! Truly a noble boy. That is the spirit, lads, in which to enter life. Thus was England made.' He patted Tommy's head and would have given him half-a-crown but that he had no half-crowns just then. 'Lord Mayor of London,' he repeated. 'Yes, that is worth aiming at. Did I ever tell you how I entertained his Royal 'Ighness the Prince of Wales?'

Had he ever told them anything else?

.

'When he went away, his Royal 'Ighness was good enough to say, "My Lord Mayor, all I can say is this, I only 'ope your Lordship's successor will entertain me as 'andsome as you 'ave entertained me 'andsome this night." That was about enough, boys, wasn't it? Eh? eh? eh?'

'Will,' said Allen, 'I hate money. They

talk about nothing else. Where are the people who read books and talk about things that don't mean money?'

'I don't know,' Will answered. 'I don't hate money. With money you can buy whatever you like. The richer I get the better I shall like it. With money, Allen, you can even buy books.'

They went to an old grammar school about two miles nearer town. To get there the lads had to tramp the two miles there and back every day; they marched side by side; frequently, on Saturday afternoons especially, they would encounter other lads from Stratford, Bow, Clapton, Stepney, and Old Ford. Then there would be a fight, in which they sometimes came off victors and sometimes had to retire. Yet not ingloriously, for who could resist the ponderous charge of Will, master of an iron fist, ambidexter, the Achilles of the Forest? Beside him charged Allen, as plucky yet not so stout of build; and, outside the *mêlée*, Tommy plied the dexterous pebble. Insomuch that

the prowess of the three was bruited abroad, and the chivalry of the East-end came forth. When the worsted combatants went home again they always boasted of a victory and egged their friends to go too, and try their luck. But it was observed by the thoughtful that no one went twice.

The school was an ancient foundation, and the boys were well taught. It was not wholly, for instance, a school for the training of the Perfect Clerk, which is simple, and means handwriting, spelling, and book-keeping. The Perfect Clerk needs little more. It was rather a school for the training of the ambitious clerk who aspires to a partnership. Most of the boys' fathers were already partners, and intended that the boys should follow after them. There were many things taught in the school, and it was the fault of the masters if the *Literæ humaniores* were generally regarded by the boys as encumbrances, or perhaps useless ornaments, to their possession. The masters, for instance, knew quantities of Latin—a fact most

discouraging to the student, because clearly they made no money. There was an atmosphere of the City about the school. And it was an interesting school, and had a most charming old building of red brick with ivy and picturesque masters' houses; yet it was a school from which the boys did not run away to sea, or enlist in the army, or go on the stage, or become artists, or take to letters, or try any of the fancy methods of living. They all looked forward to going into the City. The knowledge of this ought to make the fortune of the school.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOREST OF HAINAULT.

THE village where these boys were brought up stands on the fringe of the old forest which once covered the whole of the north of London. It has no beauty of its own, apart from the white wooden cottages with gables and porches and garden palings all covered up and almost hidden by every kind of creeping plant, and the gracious amplitude of garden which surrounds every house big and little, so that the inhabitants may enjoy the fruits of the earth in due season. It is so near London that a boy with an imagination may at any time fancy that he can hear the bells of Bow Church—not Stratford-le-Bow Church, which is much nearer—and if he stands with his head half turned

and his left hand curled round his left ear, he can easily make out what the bells say, and urn again, and become Dick Whittington, and sk Sir Charles the best way to become Lord Mayor. Yet it is so far away that London fogs fall never upon its pleasant gardens, and as for that great canopy of perpetual smoke of which we hear so much, there is not so much as the fringe of it between the children's eyes and the blue of heaven.

It is so far from London, again, as to be full of country delights, rural sounds and rural sights. The rurality of the place, to one fresh from town, seems overdone, an affectation of rurality, a pedantry and pretence, somewhat over acted, of rusticity.

Thus, nowhere are the roads more liberally edged with broad belts of grass, as if land was plentiful and cheap; nowhere will you find such broad, ugly, uncared-for ditches, with pollard willows and old oaks beside them, blackberry bushes and brambles scrambling over them, and tall weeds, reeds, and strange

wild flowers growing in them; nowhere will you find the ducks waddling by the roadside with more perfect trustfulness, as if there were no tramps or gipsies in the world; surely, a duck, of all creatures, must be sincere: she would not pretend a trustfulness she did not feel. The roadside inns are picturesque and dirty; their signs—brave old signs such as the 'Good Intent' and the 'Traveller's Rest'—hang creakily over the wooden trough full of water for the horses. There is generally a horse and cart waiting; the horse drinks at the trough, the driver, leaning against a door-post of the inn with a mug of beer in his hand, drinks and exchanges opinions with the landlord; the people in the road roll as they walk, with hands in pockets, lifting feet accustomed to a clay soil—quite as if they were hundreds of miles from London; the very children roll in their walk; they roll up, ragged and brown, like the cloud rack; they are rosy and picturesque children, save when they bang and beat each other and cry with dirty knuckles in

tearful eyes. The roads are quiet and there are few wayfarers. Sometimes when the weather is warm and the sun is sloping downwards you may see, leaning over the green palings of the cottage garden, the meditative maiden, looking up and down the dusty way. She waits, I suppose, for the Prince, who is to come some day and change her quiet life, and give her a high old time, a real romantic time, and make her happy ever after. The seasons and the days of these quiet girls' lives are very beautiful to contemplate and to read about—in little bits. All lives are to be taken, as the artist takes his landscapes—in bits. If you take a bit so big as to be, so to speak, a Piece, it becomes monotonous, even considered as a study of character. The girls themselves in this quiet place say that to be always studying your own character grows in the long run almost intolerable. And as for that Prince, unless he goes about on a bicycle on a Saturday afternoon, I have never met him in any of the lanes in these parts, and one fears indeed that he may not come until

the spring of soft cheeks and tender eyes be gone.

In the road, besides the ditches and the belt of grass, there is pig—white pig and black pig; they lie in the warm mud happy and satisfied with life. They burrow their noses among the coarse tufts of grass in search for something toothsome, of which they know, and would tell us if they could; let us never forget, my brothers, that the pig was the original discoverer—the Columbus—of Truffleland. The expression of the intelligent and mobile tail, as its owner pokes his snout into the mud, indicates the curiosity and excitement of research, and perhaps the gratitude of success. Lastly, just to prove how deep we are in the country, the air is full of sounds absolutely rural. Nowhere else so near to London can you hear such singing of birds; nowhere else so near do you get the nightingale, nowhere else so near does the dove coo. You may hear the tinkle of a sheep-bell just as if you were on Dartmoor. You may see a hawk hovering in the air as if

you were on Malvern Hill. You may hear the sharpening of the scythe, the hammer of the blacksmith, and the wo-wo-ing of the ploughboy. On Sunday evening you may watch the ploughboy making love. And never an omnibus, or a tram, or the whistle of a train.

The forest, by which the village lies, was once a very magnificent and royal place indeed. It has associations of history. One of the kings was wont to hunt here, a fact which makes it interesting to everybody. Another king once rode through the forest. The old trees remember both events very well, yet attach very small importance to them, being more concerned with the recent steps taken for their own preservation. For a very remarkable custom formerly prevailed there. The people were a religious folk and anxious to live well and keep a clear conscience. Everybody will applaud them for this. And in order to make the clarity of conscience easier and safer, they took the eighth commandment out of the decalogue,

and very soon forgot that it had ever existed, except when a new curate came and noticed its omission, and fumbled about and turned red, when one of the churchwardens would go and explain to him briefly, that in the spiritual interests of the parish, this excision had been found necessary. Because they gave up their whole leisure time to carving bits out of the forest and adding them to their own gardens, sticking up palings round these bits; here a cantle and there a snippet, here a slab and there a slice; a round corner and a square corner; a bare piece of turf, or a wooded clump: and all so neighbourly, encouraging each other the while with a 'Brother, will this be to your mind?' or 'Help yourself, neighbour;' and 'Let me recommend, sir, another slice;' or 'A piece of the woody part, dear friend.' The only tune which was popular in that otherwise unmusical neighbourhood was the Rogue's March, and the only articles in demand were axes to hew down the trees and wood ready cut and shaped for palings wherewithal to stake

out the new property. On Sundays they knocked off work and went to church and held the plate. If a rustic lopped a branch of these stolen oaks he got six months' hard, because the inequalities of rank must be respected, and nobody can be allowed to steal anything until he has begun to pay income tax.

This was, in fact, all that was left of the great Forest of Hainault; once a vast wild wood filled with wild creatures, boar and stag, fox and wolf, marten, weasel, badger, stoat, polecat, water rat, and squirrel. Nobody looked upon it, nobody lived in it, not even the gipsies; and as it was on no high-road, nobody ever visited it. In the good old days when the Lord Mayor's Court used to put rogues and vagabonds, whom pillory failed to cure, outside the city walls, they came to this forest and set up in business as robbers, murderers, highwaymen, pilferers, and farm-house sneaks. Few grew fat in those trades: most were caught and hanged: the rest, less fortunate, starved when the winter came. All through the last

century the great forest was a safe, commodious, and convenient rendezvous for those gentlemen of the road who took the eastern circuit. When this profession decayed, the forest was deserted indeed, save for the clipping, picking, and stealing all round its edge. Thirty years ago they resolved on destroying it altogether: in fact, they did destroy an enormous slice of it—the larger slice: they converted miles of wild forest, with rough uplands and green dales, covered with grand old trees, into a treeless tract, staked out in square fields and rectangular roads. Then they wagged their stupid heads and rubbed together their ridiculous hands and said it was a great improvement.

Yet not all; there remains a glorious fragment, so large as to be still called the Forest. And this place was the playground of the children of whom we write.

When Claire first began to run about with the boys I know not; the custom grew up by degrees; its origin is pre-historic; she was a very little girl at the time, and it continued till

she became a great girl, and a maiden fully grown.

To begin with, she had no other playmates; she lived a good way from the school, where the other girls were mostly boarders. Then the forest is a safe place for children; you may climb up a tree and fall off a branch, no doubt; or a branch may be detached by an evil-minded tree and come down upon you, but very little else can happen. There are pools in the forest, but most of them are shallow; there are marshy places and quags, but a wet foot is the worst that can happen; there are gipsies, but they have ceased to steal children, and only steal linen, poultry, ducks, and sucking-pigs; and even on Sundays there are never here, as there are in Epping Forest, men who bawl, drink too much beer, laugh at nothing, carry their hats at the back of their heads, shout, and behave, as regards walking, like unto a sailor on board ship when the raging winds do blow.

Then the cottage in which Claire lived was the nearest to the forest, so that she could wait

at the garden gate for the boys on their way, and be left there by them on their return.

As the children grew older they went farther afield, so that there was no part of the forest which they did not know. They belonged to the forest; when they left the houses and crossed the great meadow which stretches away from the road, and found themselves in the broad green way which, like a made road, runs here into the very heart of the forest, they were at home. The lanes which lead right and left from this green road were known to all of them; they are lanes of springy turf; over them are the boughs of oak and elm and birch; beside them, sometimes across them, are tufts or clumps or little jungles of hawthorn, honeysuckle, elder, and blackberry; the sunlight falls on these lanes through the leaves and is always soft, and there is a continual shifting of light and shade caused by the movement of the branches. The children explored all these lanes and knew whither each one led: where the broad way of turf widened out into an

amphitheatre, they made it a playing ground, a race-course, a stage for dramatic representation; where it narrowed again and became no wider than one of the little lanes they followed on through shade and sunshine under the branches of the old oaks till it opened again. They knew it all. It is not a very great forest: beside Fontainebleau and the forests of Eu or Chantilly, or the New Forest, or the Forest of Dean it is small; but it is real forest, it is wild. An active lad would soon cover the whole ground. But then a forest is not a park nor is it a field; there are endless things to explore in it; there are creatures—wild creatures—which may be started in the underwood; among them are the tame cats who have grown wild and now pass precarious lives in great discomfort; in the spring and summer the air is musical with birds of which these children knew every note; in the winter there are the donkeys who run loose and keep themselves—they will let themselves be ridden in hard times, bare backed, and never a kick, for a

crust of bread; and there are things, yea, tritons and eyvets, and wriggling things, in the pools, and jack may be caught in the river Roding: there are butterflies and moths to be chased: there are flowers in the spring, and blackberries in the autumn. Besides the creatures and the trees and flowers there is scenery; here and there hill-sides clothed with wood: slopes on which, as you stand upon them and look among the trees, the sun produces strange and wonderful effects; stretches of elastic turf; places where the forest seems to recede and still to recede as you walk along, great trees, avenues of oaks, gatherings of beeches, with ash and elm and sycamore; everywhere the underwood of hawthorn, honeysuckle, and wild rose; everywhere the freshness and fragrance of the wild wood; always light and colour even in January, when the delicate purple bloom lies upon the masses of bush and shrub and the late leaves linger on the sheltered branches, and always silence and rest from the talk of man. In such a forest

the talk of money, that was too much in the ears of these boys, was forgotten; the meanness and the poverty of their homes were forgotten; it was a school in which the boys learned those things which cannot be written down.

It is, moreover, a forest so deserted, so forgotten, that Robinson Crusoe might live there and seldom regret his island; no one knows of it; no one goes there; it leads nowhere: it is five miles from any railway station; the children had it altogether to themselves. The rowdy and the rough know it not; there are no tea-gardens; on Sunday or on the week day it is silent and lonely; you may dream away the livelong day alone under the old trees, as grey as those olives of Provence, which are born a hundred years old. No one ever goes to Hainault except, two or three times a year, a few school feasts; and then the children do not penetrate far into the wood; they play in the broad meadow that lies stretched out before it; and if you get to

the right distance from them you may catch the sweetness of the hymns which they sing; but you must not be too near them or you will hear the Cockney twang. Why, even the guide-books do not know Hainault Forest.

To have such a place all to themselves, with such a country-side to walk in, surely compensated for poverty. Why, with a turn of the wheel they might have lived at Lancaster Gate and then they would have had nothing but Kensington Gardens. On the other hand, with another turn of the wheel they might have lived in the Mile End Road and so have had nothing at all but Stepney Green.

In long summer holidays the children could take their dinners with them and make excursions around and outside the forest. For instance, they would walk over to the school at Chigwell and thence take a path across fields to Loughton; the river Roding runs through these fields; they could fish in the Roding, which after rain is an impetuous, headlong stream, but is sluggish in fair weather. There are

houses to be passed at Loughton, but beyond the houses is High Beech, and beyond High Beech stretches another forest outside the range of tramp and rowdy, and as wild almost as Hainault; beyond this comes the road, and beyond the road Copped Hall Green, an outlying bit of wild wood; and then three miles of road and then an ancient town. There is nothing in the town except the bridge over the Lea and the old Abbey Church. The Abbey buildings have long since been pulled down; the east end and chancel of the church are gone, yet what remains is stately; and it is surrounded by a churchyard in which stands an old, old tree, bound about with iron bands and provided with a bench on which should be sitting none but old men, contemplating with faith and resignation the place where they soon must lie. To one of these boys, if he went there alone and sat long enough, there presently came a vision. He saw a fierce battle, with men in armour, and armed with cross-bow, long-bow, pike, lance, and heavy sword. There

was a great shouting and clashing of weapons; there was the heavy tramp of chargers carrying knights in iron armour; there was the rushing to and fro of men who charged and men who fled: there was the hurtling of bolts and arrows in the air; there was a flight and a slaughter. It was the vision of Senlac Fight which came to the boy, because somewhere at his feet there lay the bones of King Harold and his brothers.

Or, there is another field-path which takes you to Buckhurst Hill, where there are more houses; but you can soon get through these and then you are in the forest again, where there are avenues of oaks. When you get through these you are only a mile or so from an ancient deserted church. It is empty now and dismantled; its windows are broken, its roof is gaping, it is covered all over roof and walls with the ivy of five hundred years. A place hallowed by the joys of love and marriage, the hopes of childhood, the prayers of life, the tears of death, through all these generations. Those who have lived and loved,

rejoiced and wept, lie now around their ruined church; their forgotten dust, and the very oblivion of their lives and their hopes consecrate the place. It is by such things, far more than by the formal footstep and perambulation of the bishop, that a churchyard is set apart and hallowed.

Or, again, there is another way beyond the forest which leads along narrow leafy lanes, the like of which you cannot find outside of Devonshire. You pass by the way a place at which the children always stopped to look over crumbling old wooden palings into a strange deserted graveyard. There is no church or chapel in it or sign of any building; it is a small square covered with graves, and containing one or two headstones; trees stand round it, and it is covered with long grass; a wild and ghostly place. A mile or so farther you come to a little old town; a town of which nobody ever heard, whither nobody goes; a town of red-brick gabled houses with red-tiled roofs standing all huddled together in a circle,

as if there were once walls round it; a strangely quiet town, which looks as if it had never even heard of the outer world, and took no interest in anything but itself, but proposed to go on in this retired fashion, as secure and happy and peaceful as the city of Laish.

A child who is brought up beside the sea learns daily lessons in the vastness and illimitable variety of the world. He sees the stately ships go by; he watches the waves and gathers the shells; his mind may become full of great thoughts; it cannot learn from the sea any thoughts that are small and mean. A child brought up in the monotony of endless streets must get great and noble thoughts in spite of the houses standing innumerable, row after row, line upon line; there is no education for such a child outside its home. A boy born on the steppes of Central Asia is not so badly off, because there are quantities of things to watch and wonder at on the steppe—snakes, wolves, bears, Kurd and Cossack, Turcoman and Tartar. But a child brought up in a forest learns,

besides the manners and customs of trees, the underwood, the flowers, the grass, and the forest creatures; besides the beauty of the open glades and hanging woods and tangled branches overhead; the cheerfulness of nature, the joy of every living thing, and the freedom which makes that joy possible for humanity.

This forest playfield, these wanderings in the free and open woodlands, among green glades and wild woods, affected the boys in a different way. For one, they strengthened brain and nerve and eye; they made him strong of limb, stout of heart, and keen to see things as they are. As regards the second, the forest filled his imagination and gave him food for the vague, delightful dreams which haunted him day and night.

There was the third boy. But he very soon dropped out from among them and longed for the City pavement. He sat at home, where he ruled over his mother and sisters and read tales of fashionable life, and wondered how soon it would be before he, too, might smoke cigarettes

with reckless baronets, and listen to the popping of champagne corks and sit up gambling till they were all knee deep in cards.

But Claire went with the other two, when she was a little girl and it was delight enough to run and jump; when she was older and could learn with them the secrets of the forest; and when she was so old that she could think and wonder and ask herself, in vague and girlish way, what life had yet to give.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THERE IS OUTSIDE.

'They will be nothing after all,' said Hector Philipon, looking at the boys at play, 'but little clerks—*petits commis*. Poor little chaps! that must be their fate.' He rolled another cigarette and began to reflect upon the various conditions of mankind, and especially on clerkery.

He knew the *petit commis* of Paris, and he rashly concluded that he of London resembled him, not knowing that in clerkery, as in the Church or the law, or any other calling, there are degrees, grades, depths, and heights. He thought that all alike were hopeless. Their labour, he argued, from these unsound premises, is not skilled; they have no skill or craft; they can write, spell, read, cast accounts; they are

worth in the market from fifteen to eighteen shillings a week; and though many arrive at two, three, or even four pounds a week, that is only by the generosity and pity of their employers, a race of men who are always confounding social economists and breaking the rules of the most lovely theory. These people, he ignorantly thought, must be miserable, because they have no pride in their work; because their work is monotonous, and the same from youth to age; because there are no prizes for them; because there is no dignity in their lives; because they must always remain servants; because they must pretend to be gentlemen; because they have no holidays, except one week in the year; because of necessity they must live amidst mean and monotonous surroundings.

This class of humanity did not seem, to this philosopher, even interesting: a Frenchman is never moved by a thing which is not dramatic: and it is difficult to dramatise that kind of sorrow which comes of pinching; one feels little sympathy with a man who seldom starves yet is

always kept low; who is pinched all round, in his pay and in his work; in his education and his knowledge; in his ideas and his hopes; in his art—here he is not pinched but deprived and robbed; in his religion, which requires a whole chapter of explanation; in his morals, to explain which requires a visit to the nearest music-hall; in his home, which is all pinching and pricking; in his joys, which are of the saddest. Yet this uninteresting person, if he exists, needs a great deal of pity.

He does exist, though M. Philipon ignorantly exaggerated his numbers: the hopeless clerk is found in every city. He is in London as well as in Paris, and wherever he is found he is always the same helpless, ignorant, hopeless log.

Now two, at least, of these three boys were from the beginning, as it seemed to their honest friend, destined to live the life of the hopeless clerk. Their parents were too poor to keep them at school after fourteen or fifteen, or to teach them anything beyond the ordinary school course. They had no friends, no influence, no

money, and, which was worse, they had no idea that life outside the City was even possible for any boys. It was, therefore, fortunate that they were 'found out' by Hector Philipon. In the eyes of the village M. Philipon was nothing but a very polite and well-dressed little Frenchman, who held a post generally supposed to belong to the most harmless and the meekest of mankind; those who, like hair-dressers, drapers' assistants, waiters, and vergers, have not so much as a single kick in all their profession. He was teacher of French in a large girls' school. Meekness and harmlessness were professional attributes. It was known, besides, that his butcher's bill was ridiculously small, and this was taken as in itself a proof of meekness. None of the girls had ever seen him out of temper, though he was continually tempted to commit child-murder. This was another proof of meekness. He was also reported to follow the pursuit of gardening during his leisure moments, and this was another proof of meekness, if any more were wanted. Lastly, he had

never been in business, and had therefore never failed. This was contemptible. He lived in a very little cottage of six small rooms, standing on the skirts of the forest, and surrounded by green wooden palings; beyond the palings you saw the old trees. The cottage was built of the old, not the new, warm red brick, and possessed a broad wooden porch with a bench on either side. One could sit in the porch in almost all weathers. A wistaria climbed up on one side and a jessamine on the other; round and about the house there were honeysuckle, hawthorn, lilac, laburnum, and roses—roses yellow, roses red, roses white, roses of all kinds; in the front a dainty flower garden; at the back a large vegetable and fruit garden. The harmless, polite little man could be seen on half-holidays, early in the morning, late in the evening, dressed in a blue blouse, at work among his flowers and his cabbages. He was a model teacher of French for young ladies, and he had but one fault, that he did not go to church. But then a French master is always

allowed to be a Roman Catholic, and there was no Catholic Church in the place. He was ignorantly supposed to say mass, all by himself, alone. Harmless! And yet he was the only man in all that village who had ideas! The only man who knew his fellow-men, and they thought him harmless! If I were a lady, and if, in addition to this transformation, I were to become a lady who 'bossed' a girl's school, I should not choose for my French master one whose favourite reading was Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and such revolutionary writers of the last century; nor should I feel comfortable if I knew that a red republican was turned loose among my innocent flock; nor should I keep a bit longer than I could help a man who every day, in the privacy of his home, propounded maxims and gave utterance to thoughts and sentiments of the most dangerous character. You shall see how harmless he was.

M. Philipon, while the boys were young, was unhappy because he had no one to talk to except his little daughter. At the school he

would talk to the girls in French, but he hated the girls. Yes; had Miss Billingsworth known it! He hated the girls and he detested the grammar of his own language, and he was alone and could not express his sentiments. Fortunately he began to talk to the boys who played in the forest with his Claire, and before long he made the discovery that two of them, at least, were boys with heads upon their shoulders. Then he began, partly because he had nothing to think about, to watch them and to listen to their talk while they played, because it is the talk of a boy at play which reveals the character of that boy, and he made an observation about certain differences between them. This was that one of the boys was always wanting to sit by himself and read, and always ready to borrow any book he could get and go away to secluded spots in order to read his book; further, that another was always interested in hearing the contents of that book without desiring to read it for himself, and that the third neither read nor listened, and was not athirst for infor-

mation. Now boys are like sheep in this respect, that no two boys are alike. But it requires observation to discover the differences between them. Therefore M. Philipon began to consider these boys more carefully, and he became interested in them. And by conversation and observation he was made aware that they were desperately poor and would be sent into the City as soon as they could be taken away from school. He thought of the *petit commis* of Paris, and his soul was sad for the future of the two boys, bright and brave, and born for better things. Yet what help? 'What can we do, Claire?' he asked his daughter. 'What can we do to help your friends?'

'Will has got a prize for arithmetic, and Allen for Latin, and Tommy for writing,' said Claire, implying that they wanted no help.

'That is well; yet, my child, the ignorance of all three is profound: it is phenomenal. To be sure, you are as ignorant as the boys. That matters less. None of you, I believe, know

that there are a great many people outside the City of London.'

'Oh! papa. Why, we all learn geography. I am in Asia already. Of course we all know that.'

'Claire, my dear, sit here at my feet and listen.' They were in the garden alone on a sunny afternoon. 'You are a very little girl yet, but you are thoughtful. Consider what I say. Boys who learn nothing know nothing. Boys who know nothing and have no money have no chance. Boys who have no chance become *petits commis*—little clerks. These are the *misérables* who spend their lives copying at a desk; do you wish your friends to be copying machines?'

'No, no. But Allen and Will could never be that.'

'They must be that, my child, unless we help—you and I together.'

'Why, what can I do, papa?'

'You must become suddenly five or six years older. You must try to understand

what I am doing and why. Now listen. The only thing that can help these boys is knowledge. They must know more than their competitors. What they learn at school will not help them much. I shall try to teach them the things that will be useful. Do you understand me?'

'Yes, papa.'

'Good. In order to do this I must make them eager to learn; you must help me by being yourself more eager to learn than to play.'

Her face fell a little. She would certainly rather play.

'It is for the boys' sake, my daughter.'

She hesitated no longer.

'I will be eager to learn, papa.'

'Good girl! I will reward you by telling you more. While they are learning they shall think that they are playing; only you and I will know that they are teaching themselves useful things. All the time I shall be putting things into their heads and making them am-

bitious. And you shall have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping to make men instead of machines. You may even, if you please, tell the boys.'

'The boy,' he went on, 'who knows nothing is dangerous; he has power and does not understand how to use it; he is an elector, perhaps, even, an elected; he is like a loaded gun in the hands of a monkey. Stupidity is only safe when it is blind, deaf, and sleepy. When it wakes up it is mad. Let us prevent the boys from being stupid.'

The Frenchman proceeded to act. He put on his best coat and a fresh flower in his buttonhole, assumed his most diplomatic manner, and made three calls in the village. First he called upon Mr. Massey, and next upon Mrs. Engledew. To each he pointed out the importance to a young man entering the City of one foreign language at least, and he offered to teach the boys his own gratuitously. The offer was accepted promptly and with grateful surprise. For to find a man ready to give his

services for nothing is a thing quite out of the common.

'I have always said,' remarked Sir Charles when he heard of it, 'that Monsieur Philipon was a harmless, good enough sort of person. For nothing, did you say, Massey? Dear me! In the City, now, we know better.'

'We do, indeed, Sir Charles,' said Mr. Skantlebury. It is difficult to see what services a man can render his brother man for nothing in the City, unless he gives him cargoes for nothing.

'The man is a foreigner,' said Mr. Colliber. 'I've always thought that another name for Tom Fool.'

'But if he teaches the boy French'—observed Mr. Massey, with a little doubt.

'Take his offer, Massey,' said Mr. Colliber. 'Take all you can get for nothing.'

Hector also made the same offer to Mrs. Gallaway, but it was declined because the ruler of the house said that his uncle, who had the great house at Brixton, and was in a Large

Way in Oil, had got on without French, and so could he.

The lessons were not at all what the boys expected. They looked forward with little eagerness to learning grammar and writing exercises. They found no grammar at all, and no exercises. On the contrary, the lamp was lit in the sitting-room; there were two or three books on the table. Their teacher welcomed them in French, and then informed them in English that for the future no word of their own language was to be spoken in his presence. The boys looked at each other in dismay. Why, he was always with them. Not a word of English? Were, then, their very sports in the forest to be conducted, so to speak, in French? Then M. Philipon rolled a cigarette, lit it, and began to talk to Claire. Then Claire began to talk to the boys, but they understood not one word. Then she read to her father, and presently handed them the book, but they could not read a word.

When they went home they felt inclined to

cry, and wondered whether it was possible for two boys to look more profoundly foolish.

The next evening Claire met them at the garden gate and told them a few French phrases, and the names of things about them, and what she was going to talk about with her father. Accordingly, when the lesson began, they knew what was meant, and she went round the room giving names to the things. Then they began to find French names for everything; as they played in the forest; as they walked to school and back; whenever they were with Claire. Remark, that the first thing you want in a language is the vocabulary; men who learn many languages begin after the manner of Adam, with the names, not after the manner of the schoolmaster, with the syntax. Those who do not want to learn a language begin with grammar and exercises; this is the way of our schools, and it is the cause of our brilliant success in modern languages. Next, they learned, chiefly by Claire's help, how to connect the names with verbs and adjectives

and things of that sort; and they perceived that a certain amount of grammar was necessary, which M. Philipon was so good as to put into their heads; but there was no regular teaching; he sat and listened while they talked and read. One may remark that if he had adopted the method at his school, the girls would have really learned French; but he was expected to follow the lines to which his employer was accustomed. That is to say, he read Racine with the girls and made them write exercises on the experiences of the watchmaker's aunt and the gardener's grandfather. Therefore, the girls did not learn French at all and the boys did, though they wrote no exercises at all and knew nothing about the gardener's grandfather. The difference was that Miss Billingsworth bought a machine warranted to grind in one way only, and that the boys got a man's brains given to their service and always thinking what would be best for them.

When their ears had caught the sound of the French language, when they had learned

a copious vocabulary and could read with pleasure and talk freely, though still with plenty of mistakes, their teacher set them to write: they read a story one evening and wrote it down the next; then they compared what they had written with what they had read and were put to shame. It was necessary to find out many more things in the grammar; they found these out.

Hector Philipon, in fact, was a man of ideas and of clear mind. He wanted the boys to learn, not to pretend. He therefore made them teach themselves by an intelligent process, while he taught his girls by the conventional process. In two years they really knew French. Hector, by this most precious gift, lifted them by one step out of the lower levels of clerkery; their commercial value was doubled.

One does not talk every evening with a man who has read, and can think, and has acted among his fellow-men, without results. First of all, the boys read quantities of books,

lively travels, in which the writers, being Frenchmen, looked out perpetually for dramatic situations; biographies, also written by Frenchmen, and therefore compiled with a view to *tableaux*; history, which is full of splendid scenes; and tales, especially the tales of Erckmann-Chatrian. Next, they learned that there are other forms of life besides business life in the City; this was an immense stride in knowledge; and other occupations besides making money by buying cheap and selling dear, and other men and women besides the people of the City. They got all kinds of ideas, with vague ambitions; they forgot their poverty and the very small and humble *début* into life which was before them; their hearts glowed in thinking of the great deeds of the men who had gone before them, and the splendid things which they, too, would achieve. In the course of time there grew up in both the boys a dim and shadowy vision of a great and wonderful future opening out for all the world; what it was they did not know, nor did they inquire;

nor did they realise that the thing had been suggested by their instructor. All that they understood as yet was, that some time or other the wars and battles would come to an end because there would be nothing left to fight for; that the history of the world is a history of people fighting for justice; that they would at last, somehow, arrive at justice; and that this would so far extend the general stock of happiness that there would be enough to go round and to spare. Was not this a great and suggestive lesson for the boys to learn?

Oh! harmless M. Philipon! Oh! unsuspecting village! Oh! condescension and patronage! For here were two boys, with strong brains and stout arms, already full of ideas and athirst for knowledge, and here was a crafty teacher of girls—nothing more than that—leading them on, step by step, into ways of thought, which gentlemen who had failed for an aggregate of a million and a quarter could not contemplate without horror.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW SHAME.

The time came when they must leave school and begin work. They were now fifteen years of age, and tall lads, who might have passed for seventeen. There is a House in the City—Brimage and Waring's—whose offices are situated in the square of Great St. Simon Apostle, where there is the Dutch Church, and at the London and the St. Katharine Docks. It is a House in the silk trade, which has a long and splendid history, and employs an immense quantity of clerks, workmen, porters, carters, and people of all kinds: and it has branches and agencies in the far East, and in France. The grey-headed men who draw large salaries, or have a share in the profits, have been in the

House since they were boys. They entered as clerks, ambitious rising clerks. There are, also, grey-headed men who entered with them as clerks, without ambition, hopeless clerks, who began to copy letters and add up, and are doing the same thing still, and draw, some of them, as much as two hundred pounds a year, and live at Stepney, or Pentonville, or, it may be, happy Hoxton. Allen's father began as an ambitious clerk in this House, but he went out of it and set up for himself, as do most ambitious clerks who love to be their own masters.

It was natural, therefore, that Allen's mother should apply to the partners of this House in her son's behalf. They promised to receive him, and they informed the widow that the boy should be favourably looked after.

By good fortune, Will also got into the same Firm at the same time, so that the two boys, who had so long trudged together backwards and forwards to school, now went to the City and back by the same train, sat beside each other at the same desk, and took their

dinners together for ninepence at the same luncheon-bar.

As for Tommy, he was, of course, taken into his uncle's office.

But on the evening before Allen's duties began, his mother begged him to stay at home with her. She had something to tell him. She was a woman born to be comely, smiling, and contented, but fate had been against her. The memory of past misfortune and the pinch of present poverty had taken the sunshine out of her face, which was generally hard, except when her eyes fell upon the boy. For in him was her only hope. A daughter of the City, too, who knew of no other life for a man than to go off 'to business' every morning, and to make himself a position. What her husband had tried to do, her son would succeed in doing.

The thing she had to tell was so dreadful that, when she began to tell it, she fell into passionate sobbing and crying, such as Allen had never seen before.

'Why, mother,' he said, 'if it distresses you, do not tell me.'

'It is about your father,' she cried. 'Oh! Allen—Allen—I must tell you about your father at last.'

'But I know, mother, without your telling. He failed in business, and he died, and we have been very poor ever since. You see, I know. But never mind, I will make you rich again.'

'No!' she said, bursting into fresh tears. 'There is a great deal more. The worst remains to be told. Listen, Allen. He had a partner—a man named Stephens—Engledew and Stephens was the Firm, with offices in Laburnum Court, Threadneedle Street. I knew John Stephens before I knew your father. Yes; I knew John when we were boy and girl together, and before he became a bad man. Sometimes I think that he did it out of revenge when he did it, because he asked me once to marry him, and I refused. But he went on being friendly, and I never suspected—never. A bad man—a bad man.'

She paused and wiped her eyes.

'Remember, Allen, always remember, that there never was any one like your father for honour and rectitude, which made it all the worse. And his only fault was that he believed other people to be as honourable as himself. As for his partner, he trusted him entirely; whatever Stephens told him he believed. And, oh! the things which that man told him.'

'Go on, mother,' said Allen gravely.

'My dear, I have always intended to tell you about the wickedness of this man as a warning to you. But I cannot. You must guess his wickedness when you hear about other men, as you grow older. Whatever you hear of treachery and lies and wicked profligacy, remember that Stephens, your father's partner, was worse. I think there never was, since the world began, a man so horribly—so incredibly wicked.' The poor woman's experience of vice was, to be sure, confined to this one example, so that possibly there was some exaggeration.

But Allen was not in a critical mood. He perceived that something had to be told him, much more painful than anything that had gone before. 'One day,' his mother continued, 'your father did not come home at his usual time. I waited for him till past nine o'clock. Then I was frightened, and I put on my things and took an omnibus to town to see if anything had happened. It was ten o'clock when I got to the City, and all the offices were closed, and the streets empty. But in my husband's office the gas was burning, the door was unlocked, and I found him—oh! my dear husband! oh! my poor husband!—sitting at his table with papers before him, and on his white face, as he lifted it when I opened the door, I saw despair.'

She hid her face in her hands. The tears ran down Allen's face, but he said nothing. What word of comfort could the boy find to say?

'Without a word of warning, Allen, the blow had fallen. Stephens had run away,

leaving a letter in which he confessed all. Your father was ruined.'

'What had he—Stephens—done, mother?'

'I do not know. That is, I knew once, because they told me. But I have forgotten, I know no longer. He had robbed all the money, he had borrowed more in the name of the Firm; everything was gone, credit as well as money. Your father's good name was gone; no one, he said, would ever believe that he knew nothing of the frauds—think of the word fraud—the frauds perpetrated by his partner; ruin and disgrace were before him, very likely; most likely, he said, a criminal prosecution and a prison. Think of that, Allen. Oh! boy, you have wondered why your mother never laughed; she can never laugh again, because of that night. All these things he told me in a quiet, cold way, without any anger or any hope, so that I knew his heart was quite broken. Presently, it was then half-past eleven, he kissed me—oh! God of mercy, it was the last kiss he would ever give me, my dear—my good—my

noble husband—and he bade me leave him, because he had much to do, and I must go home and think of the child. Who was I that I should disobey him at such a moment? I left him, my dear. Oh! I left him. I went home and I waited all night long beside your cradle, but he did not come home all night long—what a night!' She stopped with a kind of spasm.

Allen sprang to his feet and began to walk up and down the room.

'Mother! go on. Tell me all.'

'He never came home any more. They brought me a letter in the morning. He said that he could have borne poverty with me, but not shame. He could see no way of escape, he could find no means of proving that he knew nothing of the frauds which had been committed by his partner in his name. That he had written to everybody concerned stating the truth, and that as Heaven had taken from him what was dearer than life, he would give up that too, and he prayed that it might be

forgiven him, and that God's blessing would rest upon us, his wife and innocent boy. And then —Allen—Allen—he destroyed himself.'

She was silent. She had told all there was to tell.

'Now you know, poor boy. It will not make you happier to know it. At the office where you go to-morrow everybody knows. Sir Charles knows about it. I suppose that all the village knows.'

'Everybody, except me,' said Allen bitterly.

'And now you too know. But, Allen, there was a meeting of the creditors, and—and —the people who had been robbed. And they passed a resolution that they believed Mr. Engledew was free from any guilty knowledge in his partner's frauds. And they offered a reward for John Stephens's apprehension.'

'And did they catch him?'

'No! he was never heard of afterwards. We may suppose that he is dead. Something dreadful is sure to have happened to such a man. I hope,' she added then, with a little

hesitation, as if she was not quite satisfied with the honesty of her wish, 'I hope that he repented before he died. But, no doubt,' she cheered up a little, 'he died unrepentant and went to his own place.'

Allen threw his arms about his mother's neck and kissed her. Then he went out, put on his hat, and made for the forest. The evening was warm and light. As he passed the cottage he saw Claire in the garden alone. Her father, as usual, was hunting the common slug among the lettuces.

'Claire,' he whispered, 'come with me.'

She ran out and took his hand. They ran together across the meadow beyond which the forest begins. When they came to the trees and were hidden among the branches, Allen stopped.

'Oh, Claire,' he cried, but his voice failed, and he burst into cries and tears.

'Allen, what is it? You are going into the City to-morrow to make your fortune, and you are not happy? Will was with us half an hour ago. He was full of delight.'

'Claire, I want the earth to open and swallow me,' said Allen. 'I wish I had never been born. I wish I was dead.'

'Please, Allen, tell me why.'

He told her, in as few words as he could find, the substance of his mother's story.

'To-morrow,' he said, 'I have to go into the City and into the office where they all know me. They will say, "Is this the son of the man who was bankrupt, and who, because he might have been accused of dreadful things, killed himself?"'

'Poor Allen.' The girl was only thirteen years old, but she knew already the simple arts by which women become ministering angels. 'Poor Allen! Do you think that any of the three or four who know will care to speak or to think of such a thing? As if it was your father's fault! As if it was your fault! You may be proud of your father, Allen, not ashamed. I have heard Sir Charles say that there was no more honourable man in the City of London. Allen, dear, don't cry, I have

known—why, we have all known this all along, but no one thinks the worse of you for it. How can they? Come, let us go back to my father. Tell him that you are going into the City to-morrow for the first time—to make your fortune.'

'I hate the City,' cried the boy passionately. 'It has robbed my father of his fortune and his good name; it has robbed my mother of her happiness; what will it take from me?'

'Come, Allen,' said Claire, 'come to my father: he will comfort you.'

Despite the philosopher's consolations, it was with downcast eyes and shameful heart that Allen went into the City for the first time, while Will looked as if he, for his part, must dance and sing for joy that the time for action had arrived.

'Remember, Allen,' he said in the train, 'they think that we are just a couple of boys from school who know nothing but to copy letters. Wait a bit. They will find us out

after a time, and then we shall make our way. Don't be afraid, old boy.'

All day long Allen went about his work expecting to hear some allusions to his father's fall and suicide. Yet no one said anything about it, for the simple reason that the whole thing was forgotten, save by one or two. This forgetting of things is a natural event which people concerned in events which should be forgotten do not consider or expect. I met the other day a clergyman whom I had not seen since old days at Cambridge. He accosted me with something like a maidenly blush, saying, 'They acknowledged afterwards that it was all my handwriting.' For some time I could not understand what he meant. Then I remembered that he had been plucked for Classical Honours. It was twenty years ago, but the sight of me recalled the old shame, and he still imagined that everybody was talking of it. This was exactly the case with Allen Engledew. Nobody cared any longer to remember the misfortunes of his father. They were buried,

and will only be exhumed again when, if ever, Allen is talked about for other things—if, for instance, he should write a successful book—and then men will rake up the story and quote it in order to reduce by a measurable quantity the greatness of the new man. Who on earth cares about the father of a boy clerk, and whether he shot himself or hanged himself or disposed of himself in any other fashion?

'What is it, Allen?' asked Will, when they were coming home. 'Why have you been looking so blue all day? I call it jolly. Why, we are at work at last. Don't you like the lookout? I think it is splendid. Once we get our chance we shall go ahead. Did you see the old gentleman who got down from his carriage? That is the senior partner. He has got a town house at a place called Lancaster Gate, and a country house in Hampshire, and he's a Member of Parliament. We shall have our carriages and be Members of Parliament too. But what's the matter, Allen?'

He saw Allen's eyes were flooded, and he was fain to hide his tears in the old schoolboy fashion—with his knuckles.

'Tell me, Will,' he said, 'do you know—did anyone ever tell you, how my father died?'

'Poor old boy,' said Will, 'you are thinking of that.'

'I only heard last night. My mother told me.'

'Why, Allen, it was nearly fifteen years ago. Think no more about it. Of course we know. It was his partner's fault. Everybody knows that. Cheer up, old chap. Let's go and tell Claire about the City. You shall tell her about the golden pavement—that's all in your line—and I'll tell her about the turtle soup we had for dinner, all for ninepence, eh? at a luncheon-bar, after we'd danced on the pavement and filled our pockets with nuggets. That's in my line. Hooray! Who wouldn't be in Brimage and Waring's? What a lucky pair we are! I say, Allen, partners always, man; no quarrelling between us two. We're

brothers, we are. You and I will go up the ladder together. Don't you feel as if you were quite ready for the second rung?'

They shook hands and Allen cheered up.

'And Tommy?' he asked.

'Tommy shall be only a first cousin,' replied Will.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A PHILOSOPHER.

They still spent their evenings at the cottage, and they still continued their readings. But the schoolboy days were past; their guide began to put serious books into their hands. His library was not large, but he could borrow of a compatriot, a bookseller in Soho. He therefore introduced the boys to such writers as Chateaubriand, Prosper Mérimée, Alexis de Tocqueville, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Alfred de Musset, Béranger, and he made certain sparing use of the older writers, such as Montaigne, Rabelais, Molière, Marot, and the great tragedians. The boys read these works before they read any English literature at all. They knew, which is strange, Béranger before they knew Shakespeare, and Victor Hugo before

Milton. They did a great deal of massive reading in those years, and acquired a vast quantity of ideas.

When the boys got promotion, which came in due course, and when it was found that they knew French and could write it, and were consequently rewarded with salaries which gave them money to spend, Allen began to buy books. Every boy who loves reading knows the joy of seeing his shelf fill up and overflow into other shelves, until a whole bookcase is filled up—yea, even a whole house, a house of the largest size. And then he began to plough his delightful way through the English poets. Yet the interruption to reading caused by the eight hours of work at his desk was very grievous to him. And he made no friends among his fellow-clerks.

'Out of the boy who is always reading,' said Hector to himself, 'comes, if he is properly looked after, the man who writes.'

He watched the boy more carefully. He saw that Allen now neglected his French books

and read nothing but English, and principally English poetry.

He observed that the boy would go away by himself into the Forest, book in hand. He followed him and saw him, alone as he thought, reading aloud and declaiming. He began to wonder what, if anything, would come of it. And he congratulated himself on his own teaching, because in one thing he was successful—he had made both boys ambitious.

If you consider, you will find that every Frenchman knows, what few Englishmen ever learn, that what one man has done another can do. He therefore respects himself as much as he respects the great men of history. The magnanimity of Scipio, the heroism of Horatius, the wisdom of Cato, the eloquence of Demosthenes, the genius of Hannibal—all these qualities may, he thinks, be united in himself. These boys had learned the same lesson. They believed in themselves.

The time passed by. While it improved the appearance of the young, it played tricks, as

usual, with the middle-aged. Time did not knock out Hector's teeth, nor make him bald, nor did it cripple his legs, nor did it put chalk-stones in his knuckles, as he does to some unfortunates; but it turned his once black hair into a creamy white, beard and all, which made him resemble one of the Seven Sages, but I do not know which. They all had white hair, white beards, and bright eyes; they also had, I am sure, deep and sweet voices like this man, their successor.

Time, also, made Will a great strong fellow of six feet, with broad shoulders and sturdy limbs, as comely a lad as one may look to see anywhere. Allen was of slighter build, and he had already at eighteen acquired the stoop of those who read. His features were regular, his eyes full and lustrous. With a young man's regard for appearance he carried an eye-glass, but in his pocket lay the glasses with which he read and wrote.

On Will's face was written the brave resolve to succeed; on Allen's a curious, triumphant

look, as of one who has already succeeded. Will's face was generally grave, because, though many resolve to succeed, few carry out that resolution. Many long to travel on the same road as Dick Whittington, but cannot find their way. Yet the air of London is charged with the stories of those who have succeeded: the pavement is worn with the steps of those who have succeeded. He would get on, somehow; he must find out the way, some time.

Allen never felt any doubt or despondency at all. He held his head high, as one who has already succeeded; his eyes were triumphant; he was a young conqueror, because in imagination he had already succeeded, and because the success of which he dreamed can be won at a single bound, and because it is success in a line in which there are not many rivals, and because it is success of a kind not desired by the practical.

We have not forgotten Olinthus. He had long since left them, yet he lived in the village and was still one of them. His future looked

bright; his uncle had already promoted him to a place of some trust; he thought the way was clear before him. In person he had not attained quite to the proportions of Apollo, his lines being laid for strength rather than for grace. Compared with the other two he was like a Portsmouth wherry laid up in Haslar Creek beside a racing yacht; he was short and thickset. In order to prevent him from repining, and by way of compensation—kind Nature is always dealing out compensation and making up for things—he was endowed at the outset with an excellent opinion of his own beauty, abilities, and attractions. He 'fancied himself' as much as Narcissus, and had there been anywhere in the Forest a clear fountain, I am satisfied that he would have imitated that self-conscious shepherd, perhaps to his own undoing. Besides this, he was a young man possessed of great good-humour and natural amiability. These excellent qualities shone, visible to all observers, on his large, round, shiny face, wreathed in perpetual smiles. Few

things conduce to make a man uniformly cheerful more than a good opinion of himself. Wives should remember this fact and foster such an opinion, especially on days when contentment is wanted for cold mutton and herbs therewith. Upon his cards was written his really magnificent name, Mr. Olinthus Gallaway; but to his friends and all who love him he will ever remain plain Tommy.

Hector no longer treated them as boys—they were young men with whom he could converse as equals. They were men—he could reveal himself in his true light. He could even confess his sentiments on the nature of his occupation.

'To-morrow,' he said sorrowfully, one day towards the end of January, 'to-morrow I return to my classes. You think, then, perhaps, that I love them—my classes—*hein?* Listen! I will tell you a thing. I abhor them.' He spread out both his hands in the attitude of detestation. 'I shrink from them. If it were not for Claire, I would jump out of this frying-

pan, which scorches and broils—yes, still, after twenty years and more—into the fire, which burns. I would cross the Channel. I would go to the gendarmerie of Calais. I would say —"Behold me! it is Philipon, the man of the Barricades; you would have sent him to Cayenne. He gives himself up, he surrenders; send him, then, to exile." Yes, my friends, but for Claire, who would weep, I would brave the danger of the voyage, I would be a convict with my brethren.'

He forgot that the Empire which would have sent him there was gone, and that there was no more any reason why he should go to Cayenne at all, even if he did land at Calais. But the habit of regarding himself still as a refugee was too strong. Everybody knew, of course, that he was a French exile; it was rumoured that an immense price had been set upon his head, and it was believed that the Emperor—while Sedan was yet afar off—had often declared that he should know no rest till Hector Philipon was in a dungeon.

'Behold,' he went on to the astonished boys, 'the irony of fate! I, who love all women, because they are women; I who would believe them faultless—have to spend my life in finding out the faults of undeveloped woman—Girl. I would give them nothing but pleasure, yet I give them continual pain. It seemed to me, at first, incredible. Dionysius certainly became a schoolmaster, but he had alleviations. He was allowed to teach boys. He could therefore flog them, whip them, beat them, reward them with good strokes of foot and hand. You cannot beat—Girl. You may not throw books at—Girl. You must not suffer yourself to grow angry with—Girl. If you do, she laughs; she rejoices; she triumphs. Such, my friend, is the true disposition of Girl.'

On the subject of Girl he was eloquent, even after twenty years of teaching. Time, the great consoler, could not reconcile him with his occupation.

'I was at first,' he said, 'unhappy and

humiliated. I felt as if my goddess had been torn from me. But an inspiration—no doubt from her—made me separate Woman—whom I love—from Girl—whom I abhor. I regained my divinity. Woman smiled and became once more the giver of love and joy. As for Girl, she is not Woman at all. She is not like her in any respect. Woman has a figure to ravish the beholder's eyes; Girl is bony and makes her elbows to be felt. Woman thinks always in kindness; Girl nourishes hatred. Woman is confident of herself; Girl is jealous and suspicious. Woman inspires poetry; Girl has no imagination. When Woman puts on dress she becomes a Parisienne; Girl puts on dress and remains—Girl. Woman always tries to please; Girl, never. *En fin*, she is not Woman. She is, if you please, caterpillar, grub, chrysalis. Can one love a chrysalis?

'Again, can one love a creature who cannot learn the verb irregular, who steals her exercises, copies her translation, and looks over her neighbour's shoulders at the *dictée*, who even

makes grimaces—figure to yourself a Venus making grimaces; who pinches—yes, pinches—her companions? I understand the prudence of French mothers who confide their girls to the care of nuns. It is in order that men should not behold the chrysalis. But I am unhappy no longer. I have returned to my old worship. I say, "This is not Woman; this is Girl."'

These revolutionary sentiments were not uttered in the presence of his daughter. Claire knew that her father regarded his pupils with feelings which admitted of no favouritism, except that of the least dislike. But she did not know, and would not have understood, the distinction which he drew between Girl and Woman. He spoke also of graver things, of the Great Revolution, and her daughters, and of what they mean.

'I was born,' he said, 'when the Bourbons, who had learned nothing and forgotten nothing, had been back for ten years. I have conversed with many who remembered the

beginning of the Revolution. Some of them had not forgotten its ideas and its phrases; they spoke still—though it was not the time for such words—of the Sovereign People, the Rights of Man, and oppressed Humanity. To them a Priest was an accursed hypocrite; a King was a sanguinary tyrant; and the voice of the People was the voice of God.

'They were phrases—yes, phrases. Yet, remember, before the Revolution there were no people, there was only a mob. Do you know what La Bruyère said?

'"I see certain wild animals scattered over the fields; black, livid, burnt by the sun, bound to the earth. They have an articulate voice, and when they rise on their feet, they show a human form and are, in fact, men."

'It was a great thing to have made a people out of a herd—a flock. When the people found out themselves they began to dream greater things. I, too, my friends, being young and generous, dreamed with the others, and told my dream.'

His voice sank and he went on talking, as if to himself, in deep musical tone.

'The world for mankind. Yes—for whom else should it be? But they made mistakes. They talked of the Rights of Man. Yet the weak must be defeated. Is that a Right? There must also be rich and poor. Is it a Right—to be poor? They talked of the Voice of the People, and the Voice of God. How is one to recognise that Voice? I have sought for it, but I have never been able to hear it. Is the utterer of that Voice perchance a priest? Or if the people were to speak would they ask for more than sleep and idleness, with dancing, and feasting, and love-making? Is that the Voice of God?

'They told us that the people are full of generous aspirations. There have been four Revolutions. I do not remember any generous deeds or noble thoughts from the crowd. There have been guillotine and hanging *à la lanterne*, with pikes and heads upon them and barricades. But I do not remember to have heard

of mercy or forgiveness, or any virtue at all. Wherefore I now think that noble thoughts descend not to the ignorant and the unlearned.'

The young men listened without interrupting.

'When a man gets the idea of humanity into his head it never leaves him. Never, never. He is henceforth doomed to think of his brother-man. To comprehend, even but a little, humanity is to fill the brain. As for us, we meant well, but we hoped too much from governments. That is the mistake we always make; the thing we search for lies at our feet, we may stoop and pick it up, but we expect a government to do it for us. The Republic follows the Empire, yet the people remain the same, for even a Republic brings us no nearer the dream.'

'Yet if it is a noble dream,' said Will, 'you would not have it die.'

'It cannot die.'

'Will you tell us what it is—the dream?' asked Allen.

'No. There are some things, such as this dream, which cannot be taught and must be found out. It may be found by both of you, but it will be in different forms.'

About this time a grievous doubt and perplexity fell upon the philosopher. He asked himself whether he had done right in putting into the heads of these young men knowledge of all kinds which might only make them discontented. He was wrong to doubt. Discontent hurts no young man unless it is accompanied by laziness, when it is the Devil. As for knowledge, there is no position which is not rendered happier by its possession. I once knew a man whose business it was to tramp from office to office selling pens and books; in the evening he read and taught himself all kinds of things. His life was hallowed by his evenings. I have known a waiter who read the 'Saturday Review' regularly and was a happy waiter; and I have known a policeman who found food for thought

when on his beat by recollections of Herbert Spencer. He was a contented policeman.

'My daughter,' he asked, 'have I done well?'

Claire did not know exactly what he meant, and therefore replied, in general terms, 'that he always did well.'

'Have I done well,' he repeated, 'for these young men? There is not a better educated couple of young men in London, yet they are only clerks, and may remain servants all their lives unless they get a chance. Fate is sometimes malignant. They may never get the chance. Yet I cannot believe that these two boys, who know so much and can think and reason, will remain where they are.'

One day a Thought came to him. It was a half-holiday, and he was gardening among his lettuces, clad in the blue blouse which protected his shirt front and white waistcoat. It was a Thought so great, so splendid, so magnificent, that for the moment it intoxicated him and he reeled to and fro as one who had drunk strong

drink. When he partly recovered from this first shock his Thought flared up in his brain like an electric light, as bright as a little sun or two, insomuch that he was blinded by its splendour. It took him half an hour, or thereabouts, to recover his sight, and then his cabbages looked every one like a great Koh-i-noor diamond, so bright was the splendour of this Thought. Next, the Thought began to bellow in his ear, like the roar of cannons, or the blast of brazen trumpets, with the clashing of cymbals, the beating of big drums, and the musical roll of mighty organs, and all the time as bright as before. Finally, the Thought, still in this intense light and amid this unearthly instrumental clang, flew at him, banged him from side to side, shook him to and fro, thwacked him on the shoulder, buffeted him on either cheek, and finally doubled him up so that he fell backwards into the wheelbarrow among the cabbage-stalks, and weeds, and dead leaves —an undignified situation for one who never forgot his dignity.

All really great Thoughts are thus masterful when they first seek to possess a man. The history of great Thoughts is, in fact, one of the few really important subjects which remain to be written. The case of Peter the Hermit, for instance, may be compared with that of Hector Philipon. Peter's Thought came to him one night in his cell. He wrongly received it as if it was a diabolical visitation, or the result of indigestion, and he wrestled with it all through the night but met defeat and discomfiture, and was found in the morning by a brother hermit —who had peacefully slept through the whole of the combat, dreaming of nothing but lentils, and beans, and pulse—fairly doubled up, limp and shattered, a thread paper, all the conceit knocked out of him, and in the disposition of his shattered frame like unto a cocked hat. The story was published in the last century by Mr. Dicey, of Northampton, in a chap book, illustrated by a curious cut showing the holy man on a shutter after the clapper-clawing of the Thought. Christopher Columbus, on the

other hand, made no resistance, but obeyed at once, and allowed the Thought to take possession like a bailiff. In his case it was a voice which called, a finger which pointed, a hand which pushed, day and night, so that he could never rest, never sleep, never sit down, never speak of anything unless in obedience to the perpetual admonition of that Thought. As was Christopher, so was our Hector. He accepted the Thought after the briefest resistance, and allowed it henceforth to guide and rule him.

If that Thought had not come to Hector Philipon this history would never have been written. If that Thought had not seized him one knows not what lives of discontent, unsatisfied desire, and thwarted ambition might have been the lot of these two clerks. And yet they do not know the history of this supreme moment, this wrestling and defeat. One can hardly guess in what words, did they know it, their gratitude could be expressed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TYRANNY OF THE THOUGHT.

M. Philipon, therefore, as soon as he recovered consciousness, submitted to the domination of the Thought. It was, in fact, the wisest thing he could do, and he was rewarded presently by falling into an ecstasy or rapture which carried him out of himself for the space of ten days. This is a thing which happens to none but the most exalted souls. During this period he conversed not at all with any one. It was the last fortnight of the summer vacation when this strange thing befell him.

Claire first observed the strangeness of it at dinner. Her father took the meal without a word, answering when he was addressed, but advancing no remark or proposition of any

kind. After dinner he went into the garden and walked up and down the lawn. The boys came as usual and spoke to him, but he shook his head, and they joined Claire in her own room, wondering.

'What is it, Claire?' they asked.

'I do not know. He says nothing; he is quite silent. I have never known him like this before.'

Then Allen plucked up courage and went out upon the lawn again.

'Are you ill, sir?' he asked.

M. Philipon stopped. 'Not ill,' he replied, lifting eyes which were troubled. 'There is nothing the matter. Do not speak to me just yet.' Then his Thought overpowered him again, and he spread out his hands with a gesture of impatience and resumed his solitary walk.

The three within spoke in whispers. Night fell, but he was still walking, and took no heed, as if it mattered not to him whether it was night or day. Claire played something, but it did

not seem to rouse him. At ten the boys went away, but he did not return their good-night. Then Claire came and took him by the hand, and led him into the house unresisting. Presently she gave him a candle and told him to go to bed; and in the middle of the night she woke up and heard him walking up and down his room.

This kind of conduct, repeated the next day, and for several days afterwards, gave his daughter and his friends the greatest uneasiness. He was not ill; he took his breakfast and dinner exactly as usual, but he did not talk, nor did he read, nor did he work in the garden. He was not unhappy, because as he walked about he smiled or laughed, and waved his hands cheerfully, yet with mystery, because no one could interpret that gesture.

In fact, he was wholly absorbed and dominated by the Thought, which, as he now quite clearly perceived, was not only powerful beyond all belief, but also full of grace, and like a goddess for inexpressible beauty, and moreover

a stupendous Thought. So stupendous did it seem to him, that it loomed before his wondering eyes as a Thought more wonderful than had ever before been vouchsafed unto men.

'It is,' he might have said, enumerating other great Thoughts for purposes of comparison, in this communion and silent meditation, in this rapture of his mind, 'it is a greater Thought than that of Peter the Hermit, who yet did a considerable stroke of business with his; it is greater than that of Christopher Columbus, because he only doubled mankind, and therefore multiplied our troubles; it is greater than the Thought of him who proposed by means of steam to divide every kilomètre by a thousand; greater than the Thought of the man who, with an electric wire, abolished space altogether, so that people can go on quarrelling at opposite ends of the world; greater than the Thought of the man who proposed to send letters for a penny; greater even than that of him who discovered how to abolish pain and to let a man sleep while surgeons saw off his leg—yea, to permit

the martyr to dream of heaven while they toast him on a gridiron and perforate him with red-hot irons. Until I find words to express this Thought I am dumb. I cannot speak of anything else, and of this I have not yet learned to speak.'

In fact, M. Philipon was looking for words, and as yet no words came into his mind which were at all adequate to express the gravity of the crisis and the nature of the thing which was in his head. A Thought, however great, is nothing to the outer world unless it can be fitly and adequately expressed and presented in words so that everybody shall understand it. For instance, I know at this moment a man who has, quite unsuspected by his friends, in his head, and absolutely complete in all its parts, nothing less than a whole three-volume novel, and the best work of its kind ever yet presented to the world. He says so himself, and it is unlikely a man should be deceived in so important a point. He says, further, that the characters are absolutely original, the incidents new—fancy

getting new incidents even from this kaleidoscopic world—the pathos inimitable, the wit and the humour quite unapproached. There is an immense, a universal, and a deathless reputation—he says, who ought to know best—in that novel. When once published it will be translated into every language; it will be the delight of Eskimo and Patagonian; it will civilise the Papuan, who wants civilising very badly; it will teach the Veddah how to laugh; it will, if anything can, convert the American Irish to ways of humanity, and will even soften the heart of the Nihilist. There only wants one thing—that this incomparable work shall be written down; and this, somehow, does not get done. It is always in his mind; he has arranged the situations; he has grouped the characters, constructed his plot, prepared the opening, and provided the *dénouement*. But he does not write it. He refuses to communicate the nature of the story, of which he is as jealous as a traveller who has discovered a new lake; he waits, growing moody, for the moment

of inspiration, which never comes. He is getting old now, and he may some day soon die with the novel unwritten; he may even die of that obscure and obstinate disease—novel on the brain.

Something of this kind oppressed M. Philipon. His Thought held him fast, and he could not find fitting words in which to express it. It was not until many days of wrestling—not till he had turned the Thought over and over in his mind, and looked at it from every point of view, that he found freedom of speech. Had it been term-time, one trembles to think of uncorrected exercises and neglected rude translations.

'He will come round some time,' said Claire to the boys. 'Do not seem to be minding him.'

It mattered very little whether they minded him or not, because he observed nothing.

It was in the evening, when the boys had gone, that deliverance came. Claire had gone as far as the garden gate with them; then she returned and laid her hand upon her father's

arm, saying nothing. It was a fair moonlight night; the air was heavy with the fragrance of jessamine and honeysuckle; a still and solemn air of full but late summer, after a still, hot day. Claire's hand startled her father. He stopped, looked round him, sighed, and held up his forefinger, which meant 'Attention!'

The girl sat down on the seat within the porch, and listened. She was now nearly sixteen years of age, taller already than her father, a girl remarkable as yet for nothing but those deep blue eyes and that black hair. But one expects nothing remarkable from a girl at fifteen, unless she happens to be a maiden of Verona, where adventures have been known to arrive at a still earlier age.

She stood outside in the moonlight. He spoke gravely, even solemnly; and he spoke slowly—in his native tongue, of course.

'My child,' he said, 'listen attentively to me. You are now nearly sixteen; you have the manner and air of a greater age; you are grown up; you are a woman.'

'Yes, mon père.' She was rather frightened at this solemn introduction to the unfolding.

'I will treat you henceforth as a grown woman. You are also my daughter.'

'Yes, mon père.'

'I will treat you as a daughter who can be trusted.'

She stooped down and took his hand, and kissed it.

'I have a great thing to tell you. I have the grandest—the most magnificent scheme to communicate. I demand your absolute—your profound secresy. That is necessary. Without secresy I shall fail; without your aid success will be difficult. Understand, Claire, what I ask of you will be difficult: it will require dissimulation; pretence: perhaps even we must do violence to Puritan ideas; we may have to invent.'

Claire began to tremble. Secresy, grandeur, magnificence, with pretence! What could these mean but another revolution, with which

she associated barricades and her father upon them?

'At least,' she said, 'I hope I should never betray any secret intrusted to me.'

Her father suppressed an epigram about Eve and her daughters, and went on—

'You will not, Claire, I am sure. Yet I want more than a mere promise of secresy. I want a tongue which will not add to suspicion: I want a clear eye, an open face, a frank smile; *en effet*, if you are a conspirator you must look as if there is no conspiracy.'

'Oh!' she cried; 'do with me what you please; but if you are killed, and—and—oh! what a pity to put up barricades in the Forest!'

He laughed. 'Pretty innocent!' he said, 'be reassured, no one will be killed, there will be no fighting.'

'If there is to be no fighting, and if no one is to be in any danger——'

'No one, have no fear; you shall play your part with smiles on your face and joy in your

heart, because the object of the conspiracy is one of your friends.'

'One of the boys?'

'Yes; you have already helped me well and faithfully: help me again, but this time follow my instructions in secret.'

'Which of them?' she asked eagerly, 'which of them is it?'

'It is Allen.'

'But what has Allen to do with conspiracies and revolutions?'

'Nothing—yet. But let us go within, I have much to say to you.'

She led the way into the house and lit the lamp. Then he began to unfold his plan, standing before the empty fireplace while Claire sat in her chair and listened. A well-bred Frenchman gesticulates but little, yet more than an Englishman, and he enforces his points with hands and fingers both. This was an important occasion and he gesticulated more freely than usual.

'First, child,' he said, 'forget that I have a

plan and let us consider the boy, Allen. Fix your thoughts wholly upon Allen.

'He is eighteen years of age; he has been for three years a clerk in the City of London. He goes there every morning at half-past eight, and returns every evening at half-past six. He is away, therefore, for ten hours. During this long time he sits upon a stool, he copies letters, he enters figures in a book, he adds up, he make notes, he carries messages, he goes here, he goes there—what do I know? He is a servant. It hurts no man to be a servant for a time. The discipline of obedience is good. Yet it must be a service where he will rise to be a master. In Allen's service he cannot rise unless by extraordinary chance, because he has no money. For him there is no future, he must always be a servant. It is already, for him, the life of a dog. In ten years it will be the life of a thousand dogs.'

'But if it is bad for Allen, it is also bad for Will,' said Claire, the impartial.

'I told you to consider Allen, only. It is

not, however, so bad for the other. Will must rise: he is a young man who designs his own future and will force events; for such as Will are the great prizes of a merchant's career. I do not pity Will at present, I pity him only because in the end he will be so rich. It is the misfortune of the English people that they become so rich.'

'Then, about Allen?'

'He will become more and more miserable. In the City he has no future, he will neglect whatever chances offer; he will see no opportunity; such men as he are blind to opportunity; if a hundred doors lie open to success he would see none of them, his thoughts will be elsewhere. Money is not in his mind, nor is success. I propose, therefore, first of all, to rescue the boy from the fate of the unsuccessful clerk.'

'But if Allen has no other opening?'

'Child, you have played all your life with the boy and you know not what he is, you know nothing about him. To be sure you are

not yet of the age which looks below the surface. Know, then, that this boy is one of a kind not common. Nature makes but few like Allen Engledew; of those whom she does make, most are thrown away and lost for want of a guide and instructor. They waste their lives in regrets, in idle efforts; they succeed in nothing, because they do not try the one thing for which they were born; they never know the satisfaction of life which comes of doing what they were intended to do. That, my child, is the only happiness. How happy, for example, is the grocer whom Heaven intended for that trade! How enviable the lot of him born for a pork butchery, who actually becomes a pork butcher! But such as Allen, without a guide, stray into wrong paths and are lost. I have been already—I will continue to be that guide to Allen. By my help he shall be what nature intended him to be.'

'But what is that?' The girl's curiosity was now roused. She was to be a conspirator: there was to be a revolution; but without those

dreadful barricades with which her father's early history was so deeply charged. What was to be the part destined to be played by Allen? Was he to be an Oliver Cromwell, a Robespierre, a Marat, or Lamartine, even? For none of these positions did Allen seem eminently fitted.

Her father went on explaining. He seemed to forget that he was talking to his daughter before setting forth his views so as to make them clear to himself.

'Such a boy as Allen is, before all things, fond of books. This means two things—first, that he is curious about the world, eager to learn, and, secondly, that he is open to the influences of form and style. Words and phrases move him in the silent page as the common man is moved by the orator. He has been seized by the charm of language. You understand me not, my daughter; but listen still. When a boy has once learned to love words, when he feels how a thing said one way is delightful, and said another way is intolerable,

that boy may become a mere rhetorician, pedant, and precisian; or an orator, one of those who move the world; or a poet, one of those born to be loved.'

'And Allen, you think, will be—what? A rhetorician, or an orator, or a poet?'

'It may be the first, but I think he will not be. For I also observe in the boy the intuitions, the fire, the impatience, and the emotion, which belong to the orator who speaks because he must, and to the poet who writes because he cannot help it. I think—nay, I am sure—that a lad with these sympathies cannot be a mere rhetorician or a maker of phrases.'

Claire listened, trying still to connect this theory with the conspiracy, but she failed.

'He reads, because it is his time for reading everything. He has no choice. It is his nature to read. He was born to read. He reads by instinct. He reads poetry, and his brain is filled with magnificent colours and splendid women. He reads romances, and he

dreams of knights and stately dames; he reads history, and his heart burns within him; he reads biography, and he worships great heroes; he reads tragedy, and he straightway stalks about the Forest another Talma; he reads idyls, and the meadows become peopled to him with shepherds and shepherdesses; he lives two lives. One of these is dull and mean; to think of it, while he is living the other, makes him angry and ashamed, for in the other he lives in an enchanted world where he is a magician and can conjure spirits.'

'You know all this, mon père? But how, unless Allen has told?'

'Allen has told no one, but yet I know. Some day, my child, I will tell you how I know. Allen is already half a poet; he must be made a poet indeed.'

'That will be delightful. Is this, then, your fine conspiracy?'

'It is, my daughter, the first part only. Of the second we will speak later.'

'But if he is already half a poet——'

'At every step, my child, in the life of a man, there are two ways open, a right way and a wrong way. Allen must be guided into the right way.'

'Oh, yes, mon père!' She clapped her hands. 'Allen shall be a great poet, and I will do what you please to tell me. This is a conspiracy that I shall like.'

It had been a long preamble, and she did not understand why there was so much mystery.

'For your part, my child, Allen has arrived at a time when he must have a confidant and a companion. I have studied the symptoms. I am sure that he has already begun to try timidly whether he too cannot put thoughts into rhyme. I know the blush of his cheek, the flashing of the eye, the outward sign of the secret thought. Behold him! I can see him now'—he stood as if actually watching the lad, with his forefinger lifted—'I see him alone in his room at night. The door is locked, the lamp is lit, the desk is open, the paper is before him, but he writes not; he hesitates, he is

ashamed. At last with a blush, as a girl who confesses her love, he timidly sets something on the paper. Indeed, to write these lines is more difficult for him than for any girl to confess her love. Oh, holy modesty! Oh, blush of virginal youth! It is only from those who feel the sacred awe for written words that great things can be expected. The written word remains; it must not be lightly spoken, it remains whether it is false or true, whether it is beautiful or it is ugly; whether it is sublime or whether it lifts up or drags down the heart. Let Allen always tremble when he translates thought into word.'

'I do not understand, mon père. How do you know all this?'

'Again, my child, I will tell you another day. You know now what Allen is and what he may be. First, he is to be a poet. You must help me—thus.

'Allen must have some one in whom he can confide. Will possesses not the poetic temperament. The blood of Olinthus is pure

beer. Therefore, Claire, my child, it is you who must be his friend.'

'But he tells me nothing about his poetry.'

'My daughter, a clever girl can make a young man tell her everything.'

Claire blushed. It is not unpleasant to be told that one has such great power over other people. Of course she did not believe the statement. It is fortunately given to few girls to understand how great is their power over men. I do not think they will find it out until they have so altered themselves with political economy and platform oratory that they have destroyed this power and lost it all.

'To begin with, Claire, you will lead him to talk of himself, of poetry, and will ask him why he, too, does not write verse.'

Had Claire been some other man's daughter, Hector would have added to this simple injunction a few remarks on the wiles of coquetry, but he refrained.

'When the boy has become a poet, then—the next stage—Ask not,' he added in the deepest tones, 'what this stage may be.'

'I do not want to know,' she replied; 'it is enough for me that Allen is to be a great poet.'

Just then a thing happened which at the moment had a supernatural appearance. Beyond the cottage garden was the lane which led to the Forest. As Claire spoke, there passed before the garden gate, slowly, with hanging head, no other than the figure of Allen Engledew himself. As he passed he raised his head and turned as if to look at the house. The moon fell full upon his face and lit it with a strange, ghostly light. His large and lustrous eyes met Claire's, but they did not seem to see her, and he passed along like a ghost, or like a dumb actor upon the stage.

It was nothing supernatural; it was only Allen himself in the flesh. He had been

strolling alone in the Forest, to dream away a summer evening beneath the moonlit branches.

'Behold!' said the man with the Thought, 'we have seen our poet! His future is in our hands, and he knows it not.'

CHAPTER VII.

SAMSON AND DELILAH.

Once in the East, a long time ago, when mankind was still in the enjoyment of lusty youth, and carrying on as if youth would last for ever, with continual fighting, feasting, drinking, singing, plundering, murdering, pillaging, sacking, burning, hanging, drowning, and torturing, there was a kinglet who made the personal acquaintance of two or three gods. Not that he really was admitted into the very best circles, but one or other of the more affable deities would sometimes call and dine, drink his best wine, and promise things. Silenus, for instance, got his pupil Bacchus to let this kinglet turn everything he touched into gold; but the gift would not work, as his majesty found

out when he sat down to breakfast and discovered that not only the plate but also the bloater on the plate became pure gold. It is related that the hungry and discomfited monarch immediately traded away the gift for something in the everlasting-youth line (which proved a forgery). Now on one occasion this friend of the Immortals was asked to hear a rival performance on the flute by Pan and Apollo. He had no ear for music at all, and so tossed up heads for Pan and tails for Apollo. It came down heads, and so he gave the decision for Pan. 'You are an ass,' cried Apollo in a rage, 'and the son of an ass, and your ears shall be the ears of an ass.' The king put up his hand to feel—and so they were. It is not recorded what Pan said or did, but probably he only laughed in an unfeeling way, and went off with his syrinx to frighten the shepherds of Arcadia. Then this kinglet got a tall bonnet made, into which he poked both his long ears, and hoped that nobody would find out. As people were then, as now, en-

tirely occupied with their own affairs, nobody did find out the fact for a long time. But it made the king uneasy. He was afraid to take his usual allowance at night for fear of getting tipsy and prattling or letting his long cap fall off. One day, however, being alone in the garden, he could not refrain from removing the cap as he sat in the shade, and while the wind played deliciously about those long and hairy ears, it happened that an under-gardener, a varlet at six shillings a week and his dinner, who was pretending to be at work in the bushes, saw this remarkable and wonderful thing. Could it be? Was it possible? Did his eyes deceive him? Was witchery about? The king with two long, very long, completely finished, perfect donkey's ears! While he gazed, motionless, his majesty replaced the bonnet and walked away with as much dignity as if his royal ears were human.

When that varlet knocked off work for the day it was observed that he was possessed of a strange manner. He forgot his supper beer;

he sat apart; he was gloomy. The reason was this dreadful secret. For if he told anybody, his own head would certainly be off—in a jiffy, he assured himself; or he would be tied up in a sack and so go a-fishing or a-shrimping in the sea by himself; or he might have his outlying portions cut off, such as hands, feet, nose, ears, and tongue; or he might be burned; something dreadful would infallibly happen to him, unless he could keep that secret as tight as wax.

He kept it for a week, suffering all the time tortures as great as the punishment he wished to escape. He did not suffer himself to talk at all, knowing that he was, by gift of the gods, a babbler. He could not drink; he ventured not into any company, although a youth of gregarious turn; he did not dare even to sleep, because he talked in his sleep. At last he felt that he must tell that secret or die. He went, therefore, into the biggest and most solitary field he could find, and then, making a little hole in the ground, he confided his secret,

carefully wrapped in a pig's whisper, to the earth. Then he covered up the hole and went home quite happy, and got drunk that very evening, so relieved from fear was he.

But there was grass growing beside that hole, and near the grass there were reeds, and beside the reeds a brook. Now the grass whispered the secret to the reeds, and the reeds to the brook, and the brook to the river, and the river told the sea. That did not matter much, because though the sea is credulous and swallows everything, it never gossips. But the grass told the flowers as well, and the flowers told the bushes, and the bushes told the trees, and the trees told the birds, and they told everybody; and the under-gardener pretended to wonder like the rest of the world, and the king left off his long cap and went back to his old little cap, and let his ears stick up, and had them gilded, and said they were beautiful and an ornament to any crowned head and the blessed gift of the gods. He also ordered them to be represented on his coins

and statues, and prayers were offered to Apollo that he would thus make the ears of all the people. But Apollo refused to hear.

Thus is it shown, by lively parable, after the manner of the ancients, how one single secret may embitter and even destroy a life. But, in fact, it is only at the outset that a secret is intolerable. When it is in the way of a man's profession to hear and to guard secrets, they cease to be a burden. Lawyers who get to know a prodigious quantity of secrets are never a bit the worse, and I know at least one freemason whose knowledge of the craft secrets has never caused him a moment's pang.

Claire, with this secret upon her mind, went about at first in the most dreadful terror of letting it out. She dreamed at night that she had revealed it to Olinthus, who grinned contemptuously and pointed fingers of scorn at Allen and her father, and at herself, and said, 'Gar! He a poet! Why he hasn't got a penny!' And next, she told Will, who said it was a thing very likely indeed to be fulfilled,

because Allen was a first-rate fellow and capable of anything; but that she was a silly child for telling, and that he should never think well of her any more. And lastly, that she told Sir Charles Withycomb and his friends upon the Green. Sir Charles said that it was a most presumptuous and impudent thing of this young man even to think of—being a clerk on fifty pounds a year and his father bankrupt for a paltry sum—and that it was a most mischievous thing of Monsieur Philipon to put wild ideas into a boy's head. Then Mr. Colliber said that he felt it his duty to acquaint Miss Billingsworth with the fact that she was nourishing a seditious viper, who made boys discontented, and turned away their thoughts from getting money. This he proceeded to do, and her father was turned out of his place, and in her dream she saw him, with herself, trudging along the road, both with bare feet, and so dreadfully hungry that she really had to wake up in order to escape those awful pangs. Then she imitated the Lydian king's under-gardener, because she felt that she

must say something about it to somebody. But she was not so foolish as to tell the grass or to whisper her secret anywhere in the Forest. She told the school-girls, and in such a crafty and cunning manner that they did not understand the least bit in the world what she was telling them.

By this time Claire had begun to take part in the teaching work of the school, being half pupil, half teacher. She learned music, and she taught everything, including the elements of French. A great part of this work consists, as everybody knows, of exercises, which Claire, instead of giving out of a book, now began to write upon a blackboard for her pupils to copy and translate. At this crisis she used to write exercises such as the following: 'The poor boy. The son of the widow. He became a poet. He wrote beautiful verses. The girl helped him. He became famous. He became a great man. The girl watched him. Everybody loved him.' She could not possibly help it: she must tell some one. In this way she told the girls. They were quite young girls, who

mechanically wrote down what she dictated, and then, with no more feeling for the 'poor boy' than boys themselves under similar circumstances have for Caius and Balbus, proceeded to smudge their fingers, write down and scratch out, pinch each other, whisper and copy, ask the governess, wish it was twelve o'clock, wish that the Tower of Babel had never been built, blot their books, dog's ear their dictionaries, make grimy their grammars, and vie with each other in committing just as many faults as can possibly be made in a given number of words.

They finished and handed in their work, and Claire sent them away to wash off the ink, and to dry the tears of injured vanity which had been provoked during the lesson. She never corrected that set of exercises; she was afraid lest some of the elder girls might get hold of them and suspect something, so she burned them all. But nobody would have suspected; what was there to suspect? Who in that seminary of useful knowledge dreamed

of poets? The pupils wrote down the words, but took no heed of them, and her secret was safe. How fortunate! For if she had told the grass, and the grass had told the river Roding, and the Roding had told the Lea, and the Lea had told the Thames, the secret would have been all over London in no time.

Claire's opportunity came in a day or two. In fact, it was at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon when Allen appeared at the garden gate and asked her if she was going into the Forest that afternoon. Her father was in the garden hunting slugs, Will was away at Abridge, or among the Rodings, or on the Waltham road, on his bicycle: they would be quite alone.

Allen had been reading and had forgotten to take off his glasses; he walked beside her pensive, dreamy, full of thought, and silent. Claire, in her white frock and straw hat, tripped beside the lanky youth, waiting for him to speak, and wondering how she should introduce the subject. When she thought of what was

intended she blushed and felt a kind of awe. She was to help make Allen a great man. When he was already a great man, she thought, he would be separated entirely from them: they would watch his rise from the obscurities of the Forest. This made her feel sad, yet more resolute to do her part. As for him, he was to know nothing: he must go on being trained without suspicion; he must never know that he was guided and directed by an unseen hand.

They walked side by side across the meadow, on which stood two or three gipsy caravans, and up the long broad walk of grass with the old trees on either side. Presently they arrived at the old trysting-place, where lay the fallen tree, and where they had once, long ago, run the race for the golden apple.

No one had taken away the old fallen trunk. But gipsies or country people had lopped off the branches bit by bit for firewood; mosses had grown in its chinks and crannies; the bark

had fallen off, and the wood itself was full of rotten places. Some of the old roots were left, and these were overgrown with ivy—the broad-leaved, green ivy of which the Forest is so prodigal, and with which so many startling effects are produced. The ivy lent to the rugged roots a touch of beauty. As to the trunk no one knew, except the woodpecker, what a host of creatures this old trunk of rotting wood contained; and beneath and beside it there was quite a little coppice, a tangled undergrowth of grasses, ferns, and wild flowers.

'Our old tree,' said Claire, 'grows more beautiful every year. When it was first blown over do you remember how ugly it was, and what an eyesore?'

Allen, being still in the first stage of the poetic development, when the hands are reached out to grasp everything, thought grandly how things might here be said about the decay of life, and the beauty of suffering, and the picturesqueness of death. But he found no words ready at the moment to express

these ideas, which were consequently lost and wasted.

'Is it not a place,' the girl went on, blushing, because she did not feel what she said, but only pretended—'is it not a place full of poetry, Allen? That is why you love it so much. The others come here seldom now. But you never tire of the Forest.'

'I come,' he replied, 'because I like to be alone and to think.'

'Yes,' said Claire. 'Your mind is so full of verses that you come here to remember their beautiful thoughts.'

Allen blushed. At his age one blushes easily. It was kind of Claire to credit him with being full of beautiful thoughts. No one else thought of such a thing. And yet it was quite true, and the only difficulty was that of separating his own beautiful thoughts from other men's.

'Whom are you reading now, Allen?'

'I have got Keats. Oh!'—he breathed a deep sigh—'Claire, you must read Keats; he

takes the old Greek stories, you know, and then he dresses them up in his own language, and then—then—oh!'

'I know,' said the girl, wise now, like all girls when they have been taught, 'I know what you mean; he puts life into the old stories, and the figures live again, and we feel that he has taught us to see how beautiful they are.'

'Yes, Claire; you, too, can feel poetry. I did not know it.'

'You did not give me your confidence, Allen. If you had chosen to talk to me about what you like, you might have found out that I can understand a little as well as Will.'

She spoke with the words and she looked with the eyes of a coquette. She was, in fact, making a first tentative attempt to use that power which her father said a woman has over every man. She had pondered over that maxim a great deal, but as yet she did not understand its full meaning.

'Claire!' he cried with a gesture of im-

patience. 'there is nothing in the world like poetry; there is nothing else worth trying for. Oh! you must read Keats. Listen.' He opened the volume at hazard almost, and read:—

> Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry;
> For large white plumes are dancing in mine eye:
> Not like the formal crest of later days,
> But bending in a thousand graceful ways.

'You see, Claire, he cannot help writing poetry; he *sees* it all plain before him. And this:—

> He was a poet, sure a lover, too,
> Who stood on Latmos' top, what time there blew
> Soft breezes from the myrtle vale below,
> And brought in faintness, solemn, sweet, and slow,
> A hymn from Dian's temple.

Isn't it splendid? Or listen to this:—

> Full on the casement shone the wintry moon,
> And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
> As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
> Rose bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
> And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
> And on her hair a glory, like a saint.

Oh, Claire, it takes away your breath only to read it! What must it have been to have

written it?' Why, his secret had escaped him, but he knew it not.

'Allen!' cried Claire, becoming, for the moment, Delilah or Vivien, clasping her hands to her heart, 'what must it be actually to become—to be—a Poet! Oh! oh!'

She did not over-act her part a bit. In fact, she was so much of an artist that she half-unconsciously under-acted it. There was enough feeling in her voice, in her gesture, and her attitude as she clasped her hands; but not too much. There was less emotion than Allen himself would have put into it if he had dared to say all he felt, yet more than he would have expected from Claire.

'To be a Poet, Allen!' she repeated.

The conscious swain made no reply; his cheek became crimson; he trembled; the tears even came into his eyes by reason of the great yearning that possessed him to tell Claire what she already knew.

She went on, watching him. Surely he would confide in her; he would confess.

'If I thought,' she said, 'that I had the gift of verse, how small everything else would seem to me! But I would not dream about it, as I think some young men do. I would work every day.' This it is to have had lessons from your father in the art of diplomacy. A week before she could not have made any part of this speech.

'Claire!' cried Allen helplessly.

'I would work by myself; I should be ashamed, perhaps, to show my work; every day I should feel that I was nearer to being a Poet: that would make me happy. I should say to myself that so great a gift must not make one proud, but grateful, and a Poet may make men so much better. But I would have no other ambition—not one other ambition.'

He was listening with rapt eyes and burning cheeks. A long, ill-dressed lad, with worn coat and baggy knees, large red hands, and spectacles. Yet his eyes made him beautiful. Why, all that Claire described he had felt—he was feeling; the same hopes, the same shame,

the same locking up in his own room, with the paper spread before him, the same sacred awe at seeing words coherent, words his own, flow from his pen. He gasped, he choked; the temptation was irresistible. He fell. Like Samson, he parted with his secret to a woman —perhaps, like Samson, to his own undoing. Certainly from that moment his career was no longer his own; it belonged to the Conspiracy. Had he kept his secret he would have continued the City clerk; he might have become the perfect City clerk; he might even have become a Partner, or the clerk with a share in the Concern; but he would never have been a poet, except in ambition. It was a supreme moment, and he knew it not.

'Claire,' he whispered, 'are you a magician? Can you read thought? I am—I am—I am enduring all that you say. Oh, Claire! Claire! keep my secret.' He grasped her hand. 'I am trying to be a poet; I dream all day that I am a great poet; at night I am kept awake by the splendour of the vision that is before

me. I think I see the poets passing before my bed, bidding me be of good courage, because I am one of themselves. There are Byron, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley—all of them. And I am a poet, too, when I see them. They smile as they pass. Yet not a line written—that is, published; hardly a single thought caught out of the thousands in my head and turned into verse. Yet I dare to dream.'

'Poor Allen!' Her eyes filled with tears. Her father, then, was right. 'The time will come; you will catch the thought, you will find the words; be of good courage.'

'Yes, yes. I live in hope; yet it is all to do.'

'Why, you foolish boy, at eighteen what would you have? Begin to work, Allen. Do not dream any longer. Begin.'

'I have begun,' he said, with more blushes; 'that is, I have already—tried to write—poetry.'

So all was told; so Allen fell into the trap; so his secret became the property of the Conspiracy.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CHAMBER.

After the confession they walked home in silence. Claire was ashamed because she pretended while Allen was so much in earnest; yet she rejoiced over her success. The reality of a man's ambition always frightens a woman at first.

Allen was also ashamed and yet relieved. It was become almost intolerable to have no one in whom he could confide. At home, in the family circle, ambition is too often treated with the wet blanket or the bucket of cold water: no one believes that Johnny is going to be a great man. How can he? None of his grandfathers, cousins, brothers, or sisters have been great. Of course, he will grow up in

obscurity, like the rest of them. To dream of anything else is like contempt for one's ancestors—a dreadful impiety. Every house, in fact, is situated in the city of Nazareth. Allen knew that his mother, for instance, could not have the least sympathy with poetry. She knew none except the ancient and modern poems in her hymn-book. Even if he were to succeed she would have no sympathy. There is a success more disheartening than any failure —to win the greatness you desire and not to have it recognised. There was once, I remember, a respectable pair in a country town. They had three sons born unto them. One of these carried on his father's trade, became rich, and was much thought of by his fellow-citizens. The second, who was the dullest of the three, went to Cambridge, and was fain to take a degree in Law. Now, in his day this branch of learning was considered to be reserved for those who could not take their degree, by reason of ignorance and thickness of brain, in Arts. Then he presently went into holy

orders, and is now a country vicar, and more solemn than the whole bench of bishops. The third became a painter, and a great painter, and an Academician, and is held in high esteem, so that his name is known everywhere. The venerable parents regard this son even as the Prodigal. To be sure, he does not live on husks, nor has he yet returned to ask for the fatted calf, and from all they can hear he lives in a good house. But, you see, his greatness is not of a kind they can understand. Their eldest son is, in his line, eminent; he is a warm man; he is ex-mayor, and is greatly respected. They are proud of him. Their next son, who took the Law degree, and wags an unrelenting forefinger in a pulpit, dressed in a white surplice and a hood, is also an intelligible success. It is not every mother who has a son in the Church. But how is the painter to be classified, and with whom compared?

This might be, in some sort, Allen's portion. His mother's disappointment would be dreadful if she learned his ambition. When he set forth

on that morning when he was to mount the desk of the City clerk for the first time, she took him in her arms and solemnly kissed him with tears. 'Go,' she said, 'go, my son; retrieve the disgrace of your father. He failed, poor man, not through any fault of his own—no, no—it was his partner's doing—it was all John Stephens. But work, Allen, work, and get a good name, and perhaps some day you, too, will be rich.'

So it seemed to him, as he walked homeward through the great forest, that there was no one to trust except Claire. Will, to be sure, might be trusted to keep a secret. But he cared nothing at all about poetry; he regarded books and literature from the simplest point of view, namely, as the means of conveying information. He had no feeling for style; did not understand, in spite of instruction, what it meant, and was careless of the collocation of words, provided they conveyed the meaning intended. Allen, on the contrary, was quite happy even if there was no meaning

at all, provided the words were musical and rang melodiously on his ear. Claire would understand him—nay, she had already understood him.

'You think,' he asked timidly, 'you think, Claire, that I may, some day, succeed?'

'Oh, Allen, I am sure you will!' she replied, with the generous warmth of feminine sympathy which strengthens a man's courage and consoles the most despondent. Observe that Claire pretended no longer; she was now quite overpowered by the depth of his ambition. She believed in him henceforth as Kadijah believed in the Prophet—because he said it. Had he never produced a line of poetry in his life she would have believed in him to the end.

'As for the City,' Allen went on, 'I hate it, Claire. The same work every day; the same letters to be written; the same papers to be copied; the same figures to be entered and added up; the same chatter of the clerks. Will doesn't mind it; he takes an interest in

it. I take none—I hate it! Why, if I were to tell the fellows in the office about my—my verses they would think it the best joke they had ever heard.'

'Patience, Allen,' she said, 'patience, and keep up your courage.'

'I should have courage, and I could endure a great deal more of the City, if I had only confidence in myself.'

They parted at the garden-gate. Usually Claire contented herself with a nod and a good-night. This evening she gave Allen her hand. He understood the act to mean an assurance of secresy, but she meant more, though she did not dare to put it into words. She meant an act of respect and an appeal for forgiveness. She started with pretence and play-acting; she ended with conquest which brought humiliation with it.

'Allen,' she whispered, 'you have only half trusted me.'

'What more is there that I can tell you?'

'You can show me your verses.'

He blushed to the roots of his hair, and left her without a word. When he got home he found his mother waiting supper for him. She knew that he spent nearly all his evenings at the Cottage, and she asked no questions.

'Things going on well at the office, Allen?' she inquired. It was a daily question, just as the old residents, when they met in the morning, asked each other what news was stirring in the City.

'Nothing changes at the office, mother,' he replied wearily. 'We go there every morning, we come away every evening; nothing ever will change.'

She sighed. It was not thus that an ambitious youth should talk.

'There are many things,' she said, 'which change. Young men become known, they are promoted, they become heads of departments, they even become partners, or they go away and set up for themselves, as your father did when he had saved some money, and was known to all the friends of the House.'

'Yet he failed,' said Allen bitterly.

'Yes, he failed.' The widow's eyes filled with tears.

'Forgive me, mother. I will—I will retrieve the name; if not in one way, then in another. There are may ways, believe me, my dear mother.'

'There is only one for you, Allen; it is to win a good name, and make money in the City—where *he* hoped to make it.'

He made no reply, but presently finished his supper, and went to his own room for the night. There, with a beating heart, he unlocked his desk and spread out his verses before him. Many nights had he done this, but this night it was different; he was going to read them to himself for the last time; to-morrow he would give them to Claire. The sweet secresy would be gone; he would no longer be sole guardian, so to speak, of his children. Even for Claire's eyes to rest on them seemed a profanation. Besides, what would she think of them? How would she like them?

The door was locked, his mother had gone to bed; the house was perfectly silent; he was quite alone with his poems. He was not going to write; he was going to correct, to arrange, to read dispassionately. He spread out his papers, placed the light conveniently, and began his reading critically. Here a very odd thing happened to him. To-night he felt very strongly the strangeness of it. It happened to him, in fact, whenever he sat down to read his own verses, but it never happened so very strongly as on that night. The thing was this. At the first outset, particularly if he had not looked at the verses for a week or so, a chill disappointment fell upon him, and he grew pale with shame; for he always, on each occasion, found them cold, weak, and ineffective; a dreadful flatness marked them all. Presently, as he continued reading, a change would come over his mind—the verses would become natural, warm, glowing with fancy, full of sacred fire. Now the reason, which he did not know, was this, and no other. He began his

reading determined to maintain the attitude of an outsider. He was resolved to read on as if the leaflets before him were the work of another man altogether; as if he had been called upon by publishers to give an opinion on the literary merits of the poem. He began well, but he could not keep up the mental position. Presently, little by little, he began to remember the things which had been in his head, the effects which he desired to produce, when he wrote down those lines. These effects were always ambitious, so that he really read, not the actual words, but the great and soaring thoughts which had been in his heart. There is nothing in the whole of literature so splendid in shape and colour as the half-defined imagery of a young man's fancy; but it has never been caught. And, while Allen read, it was well that the door was shut, because he sat with tears in his eyes, with trembling hand, and with his heart aglow.

While he read and corrected, this short night of June passed away, and presently he became

aware that it was already broad day—that the sun was up and the blackbird singing in the Forest. He bitterly thought of the morrow; he would have to go to church, instead of talking to Claire about his poetry. He threw himself upon the bed, where he dreamed, not of sweet verses, as he would have wished, but of an ignoble day at his desk in the City, and a dinner at Crosby Hall in the company of Tommy.

'Your face tells me something, Claire,' said her father when the girl returned.

'Allen has confessed to me,' she replied gravely. 'You were right. He dreams of being a poet.'

On Monday evening Allen came again, but not alone, for Will was with him on his bicycle. Claire joined them, and they all three went off, as usual, into the Forest. By this time Will, nearly six feet high, was as handsome a young fellow as one may wish to see, rejoicing in his strength and in his youth. The girl could not

avoid observing the difference between his careless, natural ease, his confident bearing, his brave eyes, which looked as if he was ready to meet any reverses which Fate might send, and fight them all, and the anxious, nervous face of Allen, with his sharp, thin face, slight figure, and stooping shoulders. Will managed his iron horse with dexterity, sometimes careering round them, sometimes reining in the eager steed to a walk, sometimes darting swiftly ahead, and as swiftly returning. In these brief absences the pair conversed in guilty whispers.

'I sat up all Saturday night,' said Allen, 'and looked over my verses. It seemed as if I was reading them for the last time. Do you think you would like to see them, Claire —really?'

'Oh! Allen, of course I would, if you think you can trust me with them.'

They were both blushing, as if the secret were the recollection of a crime.

'I want,' he went on hurriedly, because Will might return at any moment, 'I want

nothing but a candid opinion, Claire—not praise which I do not deserve.' This is, in fact, what all young writers want. 'I want your dispassionate judgment. Tell me what my faults are.'

'I shall see no faults, Allen.'

'Yes, oh yes! I am sure there are faults. Sometimes I think they are full of faults; but sometimes—oh! Claire, do not think me vain—sometimes I think they are really good—worthy even of being published.'

'I am sure they are, Allen.'

'Then, Claire'—his hand stole into the breast-pocket of his coat—'I have them here. Remember, if I give them to you it must be on the promise that you are not to flatter me. Put them into the fire if you find them bad.' He said this with so rueful a face that Claire was fain to laugh at him.

'You silly boy,' she said; 'give me the papers. And what would you say if I were really to put your poems into the fire? To be sure, we have no fire in June.'

He handed her the packet, solemnly and

slowly, almost as an alchemist might hand to a disciple the secret of the elixir.

'Here is my work,' he said. 'Hide the packet, Claire. Quick, quick! I see the bicycle coming back.'

Back, in fact, it came, the face of the rider glowing in the sunlight.

'Oh, you two!' he cried, ranging alongside. 'Has Allen been firing off any more verses, Claire? The way he spouts sometimes is enough to lift off the top of a fellow's head. Did he tell you what Keats had the good luck to say about the sunset? With these fellows it's all what they say about a thing. I don't believe they really care about anything half so much as we people who don't make rhymes.'

'Ah!' said Claire; 'they care so much more for beautiful things than we do that they cannot help putting their thoughts into beautiful words.'

'Don't believe it,' said the lad of prose, 'else they wouldn't make so much fuss about what they say. But I like a rattling good

story in verse. Give me the tale of the fellow who kept the bridge; but I can't see any fun in bothering one's head about a fellow who couldn't be happy aboard ship till he'd said something fine about the sea.'

Claire laughed.

'Mostly he throws Keats at my head. Keats was no end of a fellow; once he worried the life out of the west wind, and once he got hold of a moon, and turned it full into a room; you never saw such a sight. He died young, did Keats—so that Allen had better look out.'

'Why?' asked Claire.

'Well, you see, Allen is getting so full of the poets that one of these fine days he will be setting up for a poet himself. Next thing, he'll die young, like Keats; or he'll leave off believing anything at all, like Shelley'—here he wondered why Claire, as well as Allen, looked red and guilty—'or perhaps he'll leave the City and live here, and write odes on the buttercups, like Wordsworth. He'll be a lost Allen, Claire.' He laughed, turned his vehicle,

and was off again along the level road. Will at least was a lad with no dreams.

'You see,' said Claire, 'there is no great merit in guessing your secret. But it was my father who told it to me first.'

'Your father?'

'Yes; and now Will half guesses it. Allen'—she spoke, the deceitful creature, as if moved by a sudden thought—'you want better advice than I can give you. All I can say is, that I shall find your verses beautiful and delightful; I know I shall. You must read them yourself to my father.'

'To your father? Claire, I could not.'

'Why, he is not a harsh critic. Besides, you must have some one to take counsel with, and I am only a very ignorant girl.'

'Not ignorant, Claire, unless Will and I are ignorant. You know all that we know.'

'Then, come, Allen, come with me to my father. See, he has guessed your secret already.'

'I am ashamed, Claire.' This tall lad of

eighteen was like a girl for shyness over his own verses. A man's works are to himself, when he is a boy, and bashful, even more than the charms of a maiden are to her.

'You are ashamed? Why? Because your verses are your own, Allen? That is all the more reason for pride. Come.'

They found M. Philipon in the garden among the vegetables. Consequently he had on his working blouse. At their approach he stood up and straightened his back. 'In this garden, Allen,' he said, 'there is a slug—not a common slug, a slug of vast resource and insatiable appetite. Every night I search for this slug. I give him no peace; I have vowed his destruction. Yet he is a crafty slug, and he eludes my hunt. The nature of the slug is treachery, cowardice, and greediness. For him I grow the finest peas, the largest lettuces, the roundest cabbages. He mocks me. He eats my substance; he waits till I am in bed; then he laughs and comes out. By this time he must be like a pillow for fatness.'

'Father,' said Claire, 'can you leave the slug this evening? Allen wishes to ask your counsel.'

They all went solemnly into the house, and M. Philipon sat down, assuming visibly the air of a Boileau.

'Allen has written some verses,' Claire explained, abruptly plunging at once into the middle of things. Girls have no understanding of a young man's modesty. 'He wants no one to know about them as yet, except ourselves, and he asks you to hear him read them.'

Allen acquiesced by a feeble inclination of the head and a sickly smile. He *could* not have said all this for himself in terms so plain and direct; and he felt somehow as if Claire should have participated, so to speak, in his own reserve.

'Allen has written some verses.' Why, she might just as well have said, 'Allen has walked ten miles.' Yet the thing was said, and her father was in the secret. It seemed like the letting out of water.

'You have done well,' said the critic, folding his arms, 'to entrust your ambitions to the sympathy of your playfellow and the experience of your teacher. Read your works. Expect, young man, from me a rigid censure. I look for nothing short of the merits of French verse: these merits are precision, *netteté*, clearness of thought; everywhere the right word. Even in English, where there are so many words, there is always the right word. Claire, my child, sit beside me. Open your heart to the noble sentiments of the poet, and leave to me the coldness of the critic.'

This was encouraging: Boileau, in his age, might so have received Béranger in his youth.

CHAPTER IX.

POET UNTO POET.

ALLEN took his papers from Claire's hands and prepared to read them. M. Philipon made one more effort towards hardening his features to the rigidity of the unbending critic, while Claire became obviously the sympathetic admirer. I cannot conceive of any situation more awkward for a young man of eighteen than this—fortunately an unusual one—of reading his own verses aloud. When a man has achieved a reputation, when he is sure of receiving at the end murmurs of thanks and praise, to read a poem is part of the greatness. But in the inception, even before the very beginning, when one is still a timid, sensitive lad, conscious that the verses are essays,

tentatives, at the best not too good, the ordeal is terrible.

In this case that dreadful feeling already alluded to, of chill disappointment and disgust with his own work, remained with him from the beginning to the end, and it made him read badly, so that he did not even do his work justice. He saw, too, that Claire was disappointed; he saw it because her eyes, which should have brightened had the verses pleased, and were tell-tale eyes, dropped, and she did not lift them again. There was no encouragement in her drooping head and downcast eyes. The critic's upper lip was evidently stiffened to say cruel things.

As for the verses, what can one expect of eighteen? They were skeletons, feeble imitations, weak in language, false in sentiment; they had every fault. They had, however, one virtue—they possessed that quality difficult to define, impossible to describe, which is called promise. If you go to the Grosvenor Gallery, for instance, or any other gallery, you will find

plenty of feeble pictures by amateurs and beginners; among them, however, you will discover one or two which have promise.

Claire, who could see that the verses were stilted, weak, and cold, but could not see the promise in them, was bitterly disappointed. Poor Allen! was this the outcome of all his reading? Was it with this little bundle of feeble couplets that he hoped to achieve immortality? Not an original thought, not one novel expression, not one happy phrase from beginning to end. She could not lift her eyes. She would have cried with vexation had she dared.

When the poet finished his reading he stood pale, gloomy, almost despairing. For he was self-convicted; he felt now for the first time how really bad his verses were. The enthusiasm of his conception came not, as usual, to conceal the feebleness of his execution. He looked so miserable that Claire would have burst into tears, but for a most surprising thing.

Conceive her astonishment when, at this painful moment, her father sprang to his feet

and seized Allen by both hands, crying, 'Courage, my pupil! I congratulate you; you shall be a poet.'

It was not out of kindness. Hector, the critic, saw the promise. Allen gasped.

'You think so?' he cried, with burning cheeks and glowing eyes. 'Oh, you think——'

'I am sure,' replied the new Boileau.

I do not suppose that Allen will ever again experience a moment—it was only one moment—of such unalloyed, such unexpected rapture as this. He cannot; such happiness can only come—once—to a very young man. The earthly heaven recedes and disappears as one grows older. It was a momentary glimpse of paradise. But, the critic who opened the gates closed them again abruptly.

'As for your verses,' he said, with inconceivable cruelty, 'they are detestable. So far as I can judge, being a Frenchman, and not an Englishman, they are detestable.'

Allen dropped the papers out of his hand, and turned as pale as a girl who is 'going off,'

while the verses fluttered helplessly to the floor.

'Allen!' Claire sprang forward and caught his hand. 'My father means—he does not mean——'

'I mean,' said her father firmly, 'that they are detestable. Now, Claire, my dear, play something that is soft and pleasant to take away the remembrance of those verses. So—so let me talk to this young poet if only to forget his rhymes.'

The young Apollo stood motionless, his verses lying down on the carpet. He would have shed tears had he been alone.

'Courage!' said his critic, 'courage, my son! Did you never before hear of a poet writing utterly detestable verses at eighteen? That is nothing; they all do it. Put the rubbish away and look at it, if you like, in three years time. That is my first advice; read this rigmarole make-believe no more or you will fall in love with it, and then it will stop your growth. Do you not know that to love any

below the best of women is fatal to a poet? And as your mistress so your verse. Would you take your Muse from an English institution —*hein?*—a school for young ladies? Think no more about the verses. Are you brave?'

Certainly, at this moment he did not look brave, but the exact opposite, for the shock of hearing his verses called detestable was too much for his nerves, and he was trembling, as only a lad of extremely nervous and sensitive temperament can tremble at that age when one is still a boy, but with some of the instincts of a man. All his hopes were lying in those verses, and they were detestable.

'Come, Allen,' said Hector kindly, 'do not be cast down. Detestable as they are, they have the right ring, they have promise; they show that you will, some day, write good verses. Now, are you brave?'

'I could be if I thought my work would not always be'—here he choked—'detestable.'

'It will not, believe me. Be prepared, however, to meet with the disappointment which

belongs to the career of every poet, even the worst of evils—for a poet—neglect. Yet you must persevere. Success will seem farther off than ever, yet you must persevere. Give up, first, what men most care for—wealth.'

'I do not desire money,' said Allen grandly.

'Then you will be more than a poet; you will be a philosopher. But sometimes money means—love, and to a poet love is a necessity.'

'Love?' Allen glanced involuntarily at Claire.

'Yes, but women love men who succeed; they only pity those who fail. It is sometimes the fate of a poet to succeed only when he has one foot in the grave. You may be solitary, but you must work; you may be laughed at by your friends, but you must go on working. In time you will have your reward. Yes, a great reward. The prizes of the world are all for those who can go on working.' Allen was silent. 'For the present read—read daily, and practise daily. To write verse easily is the first thing. That you will learn by practice. I

command you to write every day something. And now, if you please, I will tell you, in order to encourage you, the story of a man who tried to be a poet and failed, because he left off trying.'

'I would rather,' said Allen, feebly smiling, 'hear the story of the man who succeeded.'

'You may read plenty of such stories in books. Listen, Claire, my child; if you can listen and make music at the same time, please to go on playing. If not, leave the piano and sit on your stool, and give your father both your hands.'

Claire sat at his feet and gave him her hands. She knew that he was going to tell them something about himself.

'The young man of whom I speak was a student—*il faisoit son droit*—he was studying law. In the same way began young Arouet and young Poquelin. It is not, my friend, that law produces poets, but that poets quickly abandon law. This young student, who never opened a law-book, spent all his time in writing

poetry. At the age when you were wandering in the woods, he wandered in the streets of Paris. It was nearly thirty years ago. He was a young man—there were then many such—who had learned the ideas of the Revolution, and saw that all was not finished, but, on the other hand, all was to begin again. You do not know yet what that means, but you will some day. This young man, while his fellow-students went to Auteuil and sang of lilacs and love, used to spend his time walking about the streets of Paris, and talking with the men who wear the blouse. It is through these men, you see, that revolutions are made. He wanted to find out what they think and what they want. If you talk to these men long enough they will tell you freely what they think. This young man began to write down the stories he heard in verse; he began to write songs for the people; he told them what they wanted, and how they were to work in order to get it—all in his songs. He would become—he—this young man—one of the Poets of Humanity.

That was a noble ambition, was it not, Allen? Nothing less than a Poet of the People!'

'Ah!' cried Allen, kindling.

'When his verses were finished he took them to a publisher. Do I say one publisher? He offered them to all the publishers. Not one would take them. But he had a brother engaged in commerce. This good brother, though a plain bourgeois who abhorred the Revolution and desired order above all things, in order that he might become rich, gave him the money to publish his poems. The book was printed, it appeared——'

He was silent awhile.

'Then?' asked Allen.

'Nothing more, my friend, nothing more. It appeared from the statement of the publisher that nobody at all bought a single copy, nobody noticed the book.'

'Nobody at all? Oh, my poor father!' cried Claire.

'Nobody at all. The poet languished in absolute neglect. His very brother did not

buy a copy. Yet I think that somebody must have read them, I do not know who. For, mark this strange thing: it was in December of the year 1847 that these poems were published, and in February, 1848, the Revolution began. Yes, the Revolution. Now when it began, a coincidence happened. The people acted exactly as I in my verses had exhorted them to act. Yes; in those verses which nobody bought.'

'Oh!' said Allen.

'Yes, there was the spontaneous rising; there were the barricades; there was the street-fighting. I felt, as I stood among the *ouvriers* on the Boulevard des Italiens, that every man in the crowd must have read my verses. My children, that was a proud moment. I was the Poet of Freedom!'

'And the books?' asked Allen.

'Behold another coincidence. The shop was pillaged; the people wanted materials for a barricade. They took the handiest, the books out of that publisher's shop. Books, if you get

enough of them, make excellent barricades. The Revolution, in fact, devoured the whole edition of the very book, to which—I do not say—I do not know—to which, perhaps, it owed birth.'

'And not a single copy left?' said Claire.

'My daughter, there is not one. Nothing remains of that unknown volume, unless, indeed, the memory of the Revolution.'

Allen's eyes glowed.

'Oh!' he cried; 'to think that a poet could so move the world!'

'And a poet of twenty-one!' said Claire, gazing with pride upon her father. She knew that he had taken no ignoble part in the great revolutionary outbreak, but she had never suspected him of being its prime author.

'Only three years older than myself,' echoed Allen.

'It may have been,' said this Tyrtæus of Revolution, trying to suppress the external betrayal of pride, 'that this young man only

caught the ideas of the workmen and the students, and echoed them——'

'No,' said Allen with decision—'no: the poet leads.'

'Oh, yes,' said Claire, 'the people always wait for their poet.'

They both spoke as if they knew all about it, and as if they were quite familiar with the ways of the people. We, who know more of our brethren, may admit that if the people do always wait for their poet, they wait with great patience—as much patience as the mother of the people waits for that Ship to come home which is going to bring fortune and happiness. They wait, in fact, so patiently that they do not even talk about the advent of the poet.

'Yet,' said Hector, glowing with the memory of this unknown achievement, and still endeavouring at modesty, 'yet not one copy sold!'

'Some of the books must have been lent,' said Allen. 'I have read of books being passed round secretly from hand to hand; and

the printers may have printed for themselves copies of which they told you nothing.'

'That may have been,' said M. Philipon. 'I had quite forgotten the printers. Why, they were red republicans to a man. Yes, that must be the explanation. That makes all clear.'

'I always knew, mon père,' said Claire, kissing his hand, 'that you were as clever as you are good, but I did not know that you were so glorious.'

Allen gazed upon him with admiration, amounting to worship.

'Oh!' he murmured, 'we have been your pupils all these years and we never suspected. Why, Sir Charles is proud because he failed for a hundred thousand pounds, and ruined hundreds of families. And you, who are not proud, have——'

He stopped abruptly, because it suddenly occurred to him that two or three parallels, all equally unlucky, might be followed out on these lines. As, for instance, that Sir Charles failed for a hundred thousand pounds, and the

Revolution of 1848 failed for many hundred millions; or, that Sir Charles ruined families by the dozen, and the Revolution ruined families by the million, and so on; each one affording great matter of congratulation to the obscure and unknown but genuine author of the great movement.

'My little poems,' said Hector modestly, 'merely had the luck to precede the second convulsion which shook thrones and made priests tremble—that is all.'

'Your doing, your doing,' repeated Allen.

'My friend, I do not claim that honour. I only remark a simple coincidence. That is the story I wished to tell you. First, remark that in spite of the remarkable success of those verses I did not continue to write poetry. That was because from being an active director in modern history I had shortly to become a—a—what I am now. A mind, narrowed to so small a thing as the verb irregular, and to so contemptible a field as the intellect of Girl, cannot write poetry.'

'Your country—the world—has lost you,' said Allen.

'Yet my story should encourage you. One may not sell one's works, yet they may produce great, even wonderful results. Therefore, courage; and work. Put away that rubbish, and work. And it was a noble thought, was it not, to leave love and lilacs in the age when lilacs and love are most delightful, and to become the Poet of Humanity?'

The bright eyes of the man who should have been a great poet grew humid, and his musical voice trembled.

'Of Humanity!' Allen echoed, with glowing cheeks and brightened eyes.

CHAPTER X.

THE TEACHING OF ART.

ALLEN read no more verses to his guide; but he went on making them in obedience to his advice. If you wish to be a poet, you cannot, in fact, do better than make verses perpetually. It is only by the writing of poetry that one becomes a poet. This seems elementary, but it is not, because most people believe that a man is born a poet ready-made, and that verses drop from his pen like accounts in double entry from the pens of the less gifted. Besides writing rhyme, Allen read a great deal aloud to Claire and Will in the long winter evenings, while M. Philipon rolled his cigarettes, and watched the progress of the experiment. The brave Hector had a new interest in life since

the commencement of the great Conspiracy. The ideas of his youth had returned to him; once more he felt himself a man among men. He was still, it is true, a teacher to young ladies; but he was more, he was much more. He was a man with power in reserve; he had still his trump card to play: because he had as yet told Claire only half of his great Thought. And by this time Will was also taken into partial confidence.

'I always thought it would come to this,' he said when Allen told him about the verses. 'I believe if you were offered a partnership in Brimage and Waring with ten thousand a year, or the chance of being an author with what even casual sovereigns you could make, you would take that chance.'

'Of course I would,' Allen replied. 'Why, Will, who would not? If you are a merchant, you live out your life for the sake of making money. Can that be compared with the life of an author—a poet—who shows the better life, who interprets the thoughts of the people?'

'I don't know much about the People,' said Will. 'If they had any thoughts they wouldn't want an interpreter, I take it. As for your fine contempt for money, it is very noble, old boy; but I should like to be rich. A rich man has respect and power. And why shouldn't he live the better life—eh?'

'I suppose he might if he chose,' said Allen.

'I don't quite know what the better life is,' Will continued. 'I don't suppose it's lentils and cold water, with a hair shirt, and a cow-hide for your own shoulders. Is it?'

'Of course not,' said Allen.

'In that case I see no reason why any one in Brimage and Waring's shouldn't lead it as well as you poets. I dare say lots of the fellows do, only we don't know. I say, Allen, what will the *mater* say?'

What indeed? Allen winced at the question, and shook his head like Lord Burleigh, meaning an enormous quantity of expostulation, tears, and disappointment by that shake.

'Yes,' said Will, 'you've got all your work cut out for you there. I should like to see my father's face if I were to tell him that I was going to be a poet. Why, he has got five-and-twenty projects at least, besides those which doubled him up years ago, and he is only waiting till I have made some money to take it all away from me and begin again. He says I shall inherit a vast fortune.'

Both laughed irreverently, and it must be owned that Will interpreted the fifth commandment in a narrow sense. He honoured his father as much as he could, but that was not much.

'Of course if ever I do make money I shall take care not to lose it,' he went on. 'But to make money one must be in the City. Allen, old boy, I should like to say something, but I am afraid.'

'You cannot offend me, Will,' said Allen, 'not even if you were to call my poor verses detestable.'

'I shouldn't do that, certainly, because I

should always see what you were driving at, and you couldn't aim at anything detestable. What I mean is—I sometimes think—well——' he hesitated a good deal, because this was really a very disagreeable thing to say; 'I mean—sometimes it seems—that this desire for glory may be a pretty selfish kind of thing. Not that you are selfish, Allen, only there is a heap of things in the world which are waiting to be done. Wouldn't it be better for every one to take his share of the work and do it, without caring about being praised while he is alive and remembered when he is dead? Let a man do his work as well as he can, and have done with it.'

Allen received this admonition meekly. He confessed that he did think very much indeed about fame; the crown of laurel seemed of all things the most desirable. He owned that it might be selfish, but that he greatly longed to distinguish himself.

'After all,' said Will, thinking, 'if you do have the admiration of the whole world when

you have got one foot in the grave, how are you to enjoy it? You don't know it when a person a thousand miles off is reading your verses and admiring; you don't feel it if that person is laughing or crying over you. How much better off are you than the City man whom nobody knows?'

'You have the consciousness of your life's work,' said Allen, with grandeur.

'You don't know,' Will went on, 'how often you are read and by whom. To be sure, your portrait will be in the photograph shops, between the ballet-girls and the Beauties. That will be grand. And when you die your fame will do you no good.'

'How do you know that?' asked Allen sharply.

'Should it, more than the memory of a good life? Never mind, Allen, you will be a poet. But you must not give up the City. You can go on working all day in an office and writing every evening. You know we are going to have great chances and get partnerships some

day and be rich—but I don't know how or when. I don't think, so far as I know, that there has ever been yet a City merchant who was a poet—Rogers, to be sure; but he was only a banker. You shall be that phenomenon, the first great wealthy merchant who ever wrote poems.'

Allen laughed. A City merchant he felt very sure he should never be. How long he should have to continue a City clerk was another question, for the irksomeness of the work became every day more intolerable to him, and the drudgery more aimless. I believe that there is no torture worse than that of setting men to do work which means nothing. In military prisons they used—perhaps they do it still—to make the prisoners carry heavy shot from one place to another place and then back again—a punishment which presently brings on either softening of the brain or an irrepressible desire to kill some one. When one thinks of the City clerk—the mechanical clerk—who copies and enters and

adds up all the day long, one is reminded of the prisoners who carry the shot. The reader of Lemprière, or any other person of classical tastes, may also consider the labours of Sisyphus. Allen felt all day long like the man with the heavy shot. His labours led to nothing and were of no importance to him. He would have been walking in the Forest alone, or reading with Claire, or meditating some great design. His mind was filled with books. As yet he was able to give his daily work sufficient attention, but he felt as if the burden was every day becoming greater.

Now I suppose that no one will believe—a thing, however, perfectly true—that neither of these lads had ever been to a theatre, or a picture gallery, or a museum, or a concert, or an opera, or a collection of Art of any kind. To realise the possibility of such destitution you have to comprehend the East End, which is, to those of us who live in the West, absolutely incomprehensible. It is like a theological dogma: it is beyond man's reason. You

have also to understand how much out of the way is this village where the boys lived. It is on the Great Eastern Railway, to begin with, which isolates and cuts it off from the cultured West; and it is five miles from a station. Why, these boys never went anywhere except to and from their school until they left it. Then they went to Liverpool Street, and from that terminus to Great St. Simon Apostle. They saw nothing. I doubt if they had ever seen St. Paul's—I am sure they had not seen Westminster Abbey.

One day Hector, thinking over his great conspiracy and its progress, suddenly sprang from his chair with a bound, and with a loud cry as of one who has a swift and sudden pain.

'Claire!' he cried, 'I have forgotten——'

'What have you forgotten, papa?'

'I have forgotten—the Theatre.'

'Forgotten the Theatre?' she repeated, for the words meant nothing at all to her.

'Heaven forgive me! I have forgotten—I—a Parisian—have forgotten the Drama! Can it be possible? This it is to have been

thirty years in exile. My daughter, the education of a poet must include a knowledge of the stage, and I had overlooked it.'

'Surely it is not too late.'

'No; we must, however, lose no time. And there are pictures, music, sculpture, architecture—there is the whole world of Art. Good heavens! we must indeed lose no time.'

On the following Saturday the young men stayed in town and met Claire and her father in the evening, They all went together to the pit, where one sees best and pays least. The joy of children at a pantomime is supposed to be a pleasant sight for older eyes; yet no children at any pantomime ever fell into a greater rapture than did these two lads of eighteen—an age when many boys are sated with such sights—and the girl who sat between them. They were carried out of themselves; they were no longer in a theatre, hot, close, and crowded; they were in the forest, on the sea, in palaces among great nobles.

Fortunately it was a first night; the house was quite full; the piece was so sweet and poetical that, though it pleased the critical audience of the first performance and was full of poetry and pathos, and tears and laughter, it failed to run. The author was called, and came to the front and bowed amid the acclamation of the house. Allen for his part stood up to shout.

They came away in a dream, Claire's eyes still wet with the tears of the third act—they ought to have taken sheets with them instead of pocket-handkerchiefs, so moving was the situation.

The walk to the station, however, restored them. Will became critical about the acting, Allen about the story. One, you observe, was himself born to be a maker, the other to be a recipient of the things made. The poet gives as well as makes, the rest of us only receive: we criticise these gifts, we venture to look into the mouth of the fairest gift-horse.

'But a story acted,' said Will, 'is ten times better than a story told.'

'And there cannot be in the whole world,' said Allen with a sigh, 'a happier man to-night than the author of the piece.'

'There will be one man as happy some day,' Claire whispered. 'Do you know who, Allen?'

He blushed. Yes, to sit in a theatre to see your own noble thoughts nobly rendered; to witness the faces of a large audience all moved by the same emotions; to say to yourself, *ipse feci*—it is my handiwork; this is indeed solid and substantial reward. The time is coming again when the best genius of England will be drawn back to the stage, and the writing of dramas will be the chosen life's-work of the future Thackeray. Allen knew what Claire meant. It would be when he himself should so stand before a crowded House and hear those plaudits; but he remembered, prudently, that first he must produce a piece as worthy of applause. He must work; he must read; he must meditate.

Mrs. Engledew about this time became un-

easy about her boy. It was not only that he thought so much of books and so little of the City, but that his Saturdays seemed now devoted, afternoon and evening alike, to the pursuit of pleasure, which to her was known only as 'sight-seeing.' What possible use or delight could it be for a boy to gape in picture-galleries? Yet that was what her son was doing. Every Saturday afternoon he spent in this manner, accompanied by Will, and sometimes by Claire. They took kindly to the world of Art; it was a new and a wonderful thing to wander among the treasures of the National Gallery. Their minds became filled with new thoughts and new images. Will, for his part, speedily assumed a critical attitude, and pronounced judgment on the execution of the work; Allen and Claire considered chiefly the conception and the thought of it.

Everybody ought, we know, every day to hear a piece of good music, to see a good picture, and to read a good poem; he ought, also, to eat a good dinner, to drink a good

bottle of wine, to see a good play, listen to a good song, dance a good dance, flirt with a pretty girl—this must never be neglected because, above all things, it keeps the heart young—and tell a good story. We waste our lives in neglecting this golden rule. Titus once burst into tears because he had wasted a day in leaving out one or other of these precepts—he had forgotten to tell a good story; but sometimes we leave them all out. Look to it, brothers. These unhappy young men had to waste six days out of the seven. On the seventh they made up as much as possible, manifesting a Judaic objection to work beyond what is necessary. They persevered; they rested on the seventh day and studied Art. They got to know all the collections, all the galleries; they knew the masters in every school. Then they haunted the museums, until they were able to go through the Egyptian and the Greek rooms without yawning. They wandered among the great buildings of London; they went to concerts and theatres; they

visited every show in London during this time.

If there had been an æsthetic or artistic circle in their village they would all three have become self-conscious prigs; but there was none. They were left entirely to themselves, and they remained humble, though they were the three most remarkable young people in the east of London. Claire, as wise and accomplished as Lady Jane Grey, continued to teach the rudiments of knowledge, and was patronised by the older governesses. The young men wended their way daily to the place of business, but talked, going and coming, of things which raise the soul. The aristocracy of the village had ceased to take their old interest in them. Who, among an illustrious company of eminent bankrupts, regardeth a clerk? But more and more Allen's mind was filled with the thoughts and dreams which come in crowds to the brain of the boy of books. He should have been sent to Oxford or Cambridge, where he might have taken a fellow-

ship, and in fulness of time drifted back to London, and so, by pleasant paths and among the younger scholars, have fallen into the better kind of authorship or journalism. But that could not be. He would have, somehow, to make his own way by rude and thorny paths. And he began to inquire, in a tentative fashion, how a man may best besiege that treasure-house of glory and of wealth which is guarded by the heroic band of publishers and editors. Of course, like every young man, he looked upon a book as a copious fountain brimming over with glory. And though as yet he took little thought about money, he had no doubt that every book brought in large sums to the fortunate writer. Some day, perhaps, among the lists in that 'special' column reserved for new works his own name would be found. He read the special column every morning and used to wonder how it would feel to see your own name there. But no one in the office seemed to know anything about publishing, or books either.

'We are going on well, Claire,' said her father. 'Our poet knows books, and literature, and art. There are three things which remain for him to know. Two of them must be left for awhile. We cannot give him time and money for travel; we cannot take him into the *salons* of great ladies; but we can, my dear, introduce him to the People.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

'FORTUNATELY, there is nowhere,' said the philosopher, 'a more excellent situation for the study of the People, than that which lies almost close to our hand. In the east of London we have the People pure and unmixed. It is better, even, than the Faubourg St. Antoine. Here there are two millions of the people all living together; there is hardly a single gentleman, or a rich man, or an artist, or a man of taste, unless it is a Priest or Minister here and there, among them all. The English are a truly wonderful nation. What other country can show a city of two million—larger than all Paris—given over entirely to the *ouvrier*? To say that they have no amusements is to say that they are English. No theatres, no place to

dance, no place for music, no gardens, no cafés —nothing. Or, yes, there are the churches. If it were not for the churches, we should have presented before us a unique example of people developed without control, and according to the laws of their creation.'

'I think the working men do not go to church,' said Claire.

'Is that the case?' said her father, doubtfully. 'I thought all English people went to church twice every Sunday. If, however, they do not, it is fortunate for the observer. Allen's business is arranged for him. It is a truly magnificent opportunity. He will discover the natural Englishman—two millions of him—the working man of England as he is, without education, knowledge, government, or religion. Yet they give him the vote; they make him elector; they make him their master.'

'Allen need not go to Whitechapel to see working men,' said Claire coldly, because she saw no necessity for the study of the People. 'He may go to High Beech in Epping Forest

on Sundays. I believe he will find them there.'

'Ah! The man who drinks beer and catches his friends by the arm; he who pushes his hat to the back of his head and opens his mouth; the man who tears the branches from the trees, and would pull the hawthorns up by the roots if he were strong enough. Yes, I have seen that man; but he is not the People, Claire.'

Claire smiled. She did not believe in the People, either with a capital letter or without.

'I shall begin,' he said, the map of London before him, and a ruler and a red lead pencil in his hand, 'with dividing the East into districts. We will take each district in turns; we will consecrate Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon to our exploration of the People: thus we shall be among them twice a week. I estimate, Claire, that there will be one thousand five hundred miles of streets to be walked over. If we take ten miles a day, we shall accomplish the task in a hundred and fifty days, which will

be exactly a year and a half. Expect, therefore, in a year and a half that Allen will have a complete knowledge of the People.'

That same evening he partly opened his mind to Allen on the subject, keeping always something behind, like a true conspirator.

'My disciple,' he said, 'for three years and more you have followed my counsels and been guided by me. Are you satisfied, so far?'

'Quite,' said Allen. 'You have taught me more, far more, than I ever expected to learn—more than I had the least right to expect.'

'You have, my son, learned to write. Claire tells me your verses are no longer detestable but admirable. You have read a great quantity of books; you have begun to form a style of your own.'

Allen blushed with pleasure. He was still a very young man, though between eighteen and twenty-one there is a great space, almost a gulf; but still he blushed when he was praised.

'You have received,' continued the Sage, with solemnity, 'a preparation for your work

which ought to fit you for it. A poet should know the Voice of nature. You were brought up in the solitudes among the trees and the silence of the forest. A poet should know the great works of other poets. You have read the best of French and English poets. A poet should show himself ready to struggle against adverse circumstances. You have served your apprenticeship in being forced to spend your days in a City office. A poet should know the Voice of Art. You have learned to recognise that Voice, Allen; your education is complete, except one thing.'

'What is that?' he asked.

'You have not yet learned to know the Voice of the People.'

'Oh!' said Will, who was also present. But he said no more, and therefore we are quite free to guess what he meant; but I think he remembered a certain saying of M. Philipon's about Humanity.

'I was myself,' Hector continued, 'the poet of Humanity. What else a poet exists for I

know not, unless to sing of love, which is always pleasant. Go among the people. Read their heart. Study them. Make friends among them. Listen till you hear their Voice.'

Allen nodded his head thoughtfully.

'When you know them well, when your heart beats with them, you will no longer care to be a poet of love; you will be a poet of life.'

'Of life?' echoed Will. 'Is that quite the same thing as to be the Poet of the People?'

'See,' continued M. Philipon without replying, 'here is the map of great London. Here are the great contiguous cities, the beautiful, picturesque, and unknown, of Whitechapel, Stepney, Bow, Stratford, Old Ford, Clapton, Bethnal Green, Shadwell, and Wapping. They are all of them cities of the People. They are cities of the industrious poor; they are cities of the ignorant. If their country is great they know nothing of her greatness, because nobody teaches them. You English are so proud in your greatness that you do not think

it worth your while to teach your own people how great they are. If the country is rich and glorious, they see nothing of the wealth or the glory. If it is full of Art and treasures it matters nothing to them; they know nothing of Art, they are left to find out Art and everything else by themselves. They are left entirely to themselves; they are the People in naked simplicity; a more naked simplicity does not exist. It is wonderful; it is most wonderful.'

He paused and went on with his ruler and his square.

'Here, Allen, you must wander till you know the People. I have marked your country out into districts. The poet must gather materials for his song; he must be inspired by divine indignation; he must be angry. Every Saturday you must take one of my districts and walk over it slowly, and make your observations. Every Sunday, also, you must walk over; and in this way, in a year and a half, you will have seen the whole. Then, Allen, and not till then, your education will be complete.

Your brain will be full, your hand will be ready, when the inspiration comes.'

Allen accepted the map and considered it. His commission was a roving one: he was to wander among streets, and he was to observe, to watch, to see what there was to be seen. He was, in short, to learn the People. Simple directions these. He felt like Columbus setting forth on a voyage of discovery. One rule only: keep steering west.

'Come, Allen,' said Will next Saturday, 'let us begin the pilgrimage.'

Of course, Will went with him. He was not as yet greatly interested in the People, but he wanted to see what would happen.

They took one of the districts, almost at hap-hazard, and they walked up and down its streets for the whole afternoon, looking about them.

In the evening they reported, as the sum of their observations, that an Irishman under the influence of drink had accosted them, and cursed the Government of the country, from

the Queen to the office-boy; that he had next produced a knife, which, he said, had already murdered a great many landlords, and threatened to stick it into them. No other adventure had happened to them. The streets, they remarked, were almost deserted, except for the children who played in the gutters and made boats, carts, houses, weapons, armour, out of broken bottles, bits of paper, cabbage stalks, fish bones, scraps of wood, and such things. The houses were all exactly the same, and seemed the result of a combination among the builders to be as mean as they could for the money. Now and then they came upon a chapel. There were no trees, no gardens, no green things at all; there were not many clean blinds.

'The first day, Allen,' said Will, 'hasn't brought us much nearer the People. Listen!'

They were in a narrow street of small houses, dirty and ill-kept. Will stood still and held up a finger of attention.

'I hear nothing,' said Allen.

'Nor I. Then let us go home and report that we have not yet heard that Voice.'

The next day being Sunday, they made another attempt. Their district included Whitechapel Road, and there was preaching going on.

'Here,' said Will, 'there seems a good deal of Voice, and it has got jaws of brass and lungs of cast-iron. Let us listen with all our might.'

One man was standing in the centre of a ring, and proving quite conclusively that there was no soul, no heaven, no after-life, no Providence, no Creator, no hope, no right, no wrong, no rule of life, no reason for anything but self-preservation.

'He looks,' said Will, 'as if he hadn't many opportunities in early life of getting to the bottom of things. Do you think his is the Voice?'

His audience listened to him with languid interest. They had heard the whole thing before, over and over again. They were, in

fact, bored with a problem which had nothing to do, they were now persuaded, with themselves. But it wanted more than a quarter of an hour to the opening of the public-houses.

Another stump-orator, also with his little circle, was loudly demonstrating that the Government of this country, and of all other countries, exists only for the purpose of oppressing the people and of making rich men richer. There could be no happiness, this philosopher maintained, until the abolition of all governments was finally, and once for all, carried out. He was listened to by his group with the same languid interest. The East-End people have no concern in governments. No one governs them. But they waited for the opening of the public-houses.

'I wonder,' said Will, 'if this is the Voice.'

In the middle of the next group was a man vehemently gesticulating, and loudly calling upon his hearers to turn away from their wickedness and their filthy sin, and to repent. His hearers stood around him quite as much

unmoved by this as by the other voices. It yet wanted a quarter to one, when the doors would be opened.

Another man preached temperance, and drew the usual appalling pictures of misery and of money wasted which should have been money saved, and of crime, and death, and disgrace, through drink.

'This,' said Will, 'seems the most sensible Voice of the lot.'

The workmen on the pavement had heard it all before; they knew what was coming. They stood still and listened, but paid no heed. They only smoked their pipes and remarked to each other that it was ten minutes to one.

In the side streets the young children were playing, but no grown persons were visible at all. And the houses in this district were more squalid than any they had seen before.

'There is no doubt,' said Will, 'that we have got to the lowest level here—the hard pan, as the Americans say. Do you feel yet

at all like getting a firm grip of the People, Allen?'

Allen shook his head.

They also made the discovery—made by many before them—that all the well-dressed people go to church or chapel, and that those who are not well-dressed stay away. Therefore it would seem at first as if religion begins with a frock-coat, and the man in the workman's jacket does not feel any necessity for religion. This is a most truly wonderful outcome of civilisation. There seems no active hostility to church or chapel. Religion appears to most of the people a very harmless thing, but they don't want it for themselves. And if a man lacks the religious sense, how shall another man restore it to him? Perhaps, when one lives for ever in a great crowd, one's own personality is destroyed, and each man thinks only of the crowd.

Another day their journey took them among rows of streets where the houses were as monotonous, but not so mean; as ugly, but

not so squalid: they had white curtains, and every house boasted something ornamental, such as a big Bible, or a desk, or a vase with artificial flowers, and most of the streets terminated with the railings of a vast great cemetery, crowded with stones, which marked for posterity—who never go to read these stones, and indeed cannot because they are railed off—the names of the obscure and long-forgotten dead.

'If it is dreadful to live here, it must be more than dreadful to be buried here,' said Will. 'Come away, Allen. Let us think of Waltham Abbey or old Chingford Church.'

Another day their district included Limehouse and the East India Road, and they remarked the manners and customs of the sailors, especially the foreign sailors. Also they were privileged in witnessing a little drama, got up, perhaps, for their benefit. It was a drama for two, the principal part being taken by a Maltese sailor, and the second part by a Greek. The play opened with two men gambling,

quietly sitting on the pavement. Naturally one was a winner and the other a loser. The latter—who, of course, was the Maltese—lost his money first, his temper next, and his self-control last. Then he sprang to his feet, and with flashing eyes and wild gesture accused the Greek of cheating—in fact they were both cheating, but the Greek cheated best—and demanded his money back. The other rose too, and in calm and mocking tones gave him to understand that the money was safe in his own pocket and would remain there. Whereupon the Maltese drew a knife—a long, glittering knife—and swiftly plunged it into the body of that Greek, who fell with a yell, and two policemen bore down upon the Maltese, and they carried the Greek to the Foreign Sailors' Home and the Maltese to the House of Repentance and Little Ease, and the drama was finished.

There were a good many spectators of this one-act tragedy, and quite a little crowd of women, who seemed acquainted with sailors and their ways, and took boundless interest in

a fight and a stabbing. They commented on the performance very much as if the place was the Royal Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, and they were in the gallery. They lamented that so fine a tableau as the fallen Greek and the Maltese with the blood-dripping knife in his hand had not been led up to with a more artistic finish. There should have been more dialogue; there should have been more of a fight. The Greek should have had his knife as well.

It was too sudden, too soon over; yet delightful while it lasted. So in the amphitheatre talked the women of Rome, when some gallant young prisoner, who ought to have made play for them for half an hour, was done to death at once and with a single stroke of the tiger's claw. Too sudden. They love fighting, these women; they long for more. They would restore the bull-fight. They would throw the enemies of their country to the lions; they would arm them to fight against each other in the arena. When they had discussed the fight,

the ladies proceeded to speculate on the trial, the verdict, and the sentence. Should the Greek die—but what a thousand pities that a man can no longer go in public, amid the acclamations of his friends, to his own hanging!

'I wonder,' said Will, 'if this is the Heart of the people?'

They reported discouragement.

'Go on,' said Hector, 'you will find, some time or other, what you are looking for. Go on.'

He meant that Allen would find what he wished him to find. They went on; they pursued that tramp week after week, in fine weather and foul, till the monotony of the streets seemed intolerable.

'They are brought up in this,' said Will one day, 'they don't feel it as we do, who have had the Forest. Do you begin to understand how they must look on life? Do you begin to see why they have no religion?'

'What do you mean, Will?'

'I mean,' said Will, 'that without some

sense of beautiful things, faith must be impossible. What beautiful things can be imagined in these horrible streets?'

It was Sunday afternoon. They were passing a little chapel, mean and ugly. There was a children's service, or school, going on, and, as if in answer to Will's question, the fresh voices of the little ones sang as they passed, 'There is a happy land, far, far away.'

'Oh!' cried Will, looking round him, 'what sort of happiness, what kind of land, can they expect?'

But the eyes of his companion filled with tears.

'We have been everywhere,' said Will that night to the philosopher. 'We have tramped through Hoxton and Hackney, Whitechapel and Stepney. We know Wapping, Shadwell, and Limehouse. We have seen the big breweries and the docks, and the gasworks, and the cemeteries. We have seen the People, but we cannot find out their Heart, and we cannot hear their Voice.'

'And you, Allen, can you not hear the Voice of the people?'

'No; I am farther than ever from finding out their Heart or their Voice.'

'Often,' said Hector, 'in looking for one thing we find another. Do not forget what you have seen.'

They did not yet give in. They had hitherto gone only about the streets; they would go to places where the people meet together. They found there were two or three music-halls, half a dozen debating societies, and certain radical clubs.

At the music-halls they heard songs so unspeakably vulgar, so inexpressively detestable, that they ignorantly concluded they were a *spécialité* of the East End. Alas! even in the more æsthetic West, there is a demand for similar musical effects. The atmosphere of the halls was laden with tobacco, gas, and foul air. 'Arry was there, with Alf and George, and all their friends. They are the clubs of the lower clerkdom, the *prés aux clercs*.

At the debating-club they heard a most amazing quantity of talk, but no one seemed to have taken any trouble to master his facts; no one knew anything. This ignorance to these mistaken young men also appeared a *spécialité* of the East End. But then they had never attended the debates in the House.

In the chapels they heard everywhere the same exhortations and expressions, in the same words, addressed to decent people in black coats, who looked as if they were passing on the discourse to some one else, because it did not concern themselves.

They went to the public-houses and called for glasses of beer, and they listened for the Voice there. They heard a voice, to be sure, a thick, hoarse voice, full of ugly words, and certainly not a heavenly voice. Then befell Allen something of the feeling which possessed Dante when he gazed upon the souls of the hapless lost. He became haunted by crowds of faces, processions of faces, an ocean of faces. When he slept at night these faces gazed upon

him; when he walked, or read, or sat at work, these faces were always looking upon him. There were millions of them—two millions—as nearly as he could count—and he seemed to know them all. They were all different, yet all alike in one respect, that they were all faces which lacked something. There was no happiness in them; they were dull, they had no sunshine in them; they bore no secret fountains of joy beneath them, they wanted hope. They were ignorant faces. As Allen looked on them he was seized with terror, for he saw before him the whole of East London—the mighty City, the neglected City, the joyless City, the City of the baser sort, and he trembled. If the vision of the multitudinous face, this troubled and turbid ocean of heavy brows and dull, disappointed eyes, had continued, I think the young man would have gone mad; but presently there came relief when that thing happened to him, which has also happened to Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Hood, and many others. Out of the faces, out of the multitudes

which throng the thoroughfares of the Joyless City like ants upon an ant-hill, there presently began to detach themselves, by ones and twos, singly or in little groups, separate figures; while he looked upon them the background of faces disappeared. These figures, however, never left him, day after day, but continued shadows impalpable, yet plain to behold, and acted and talked before him. He listened and looked until he knew them, knew their very thoughts, knew why they acted and what they would do next; knew their manner of speech, their hopes, and their anxieties, their very prejudices; man and woman they stood before him, and bared their souls, and were not ashamed. They were unlovely; some of them were like monstrous figments created by a fantastic artist, so hideous were they; but these were the old; some among the young were beautiful, but it seemed as if while he looked upon them, invisible fingers were taking the beauty out of their faces and the sweetness out of their eyes.

There were young girls among them, quite

a group of young girls; and one came forth timidly and said, 'Take me. I will tell you all that is in my heart, all that I do, all that I hope, all that I know; I am yours altogether.' He followed and watched this girl among her companions; she was in the work-room, walking with other girls on Sundays; she was quite young and full of vague hopes, but she knew nothing. She had her chapel on Sunday; and she had her lover. She played out her little story—a poor and pitiful one—to the very end, and presently that story was finished and she vanished, falling back into the crowd and was no more seen, though Allen looked everywhere for her among the most miserable of her sex. There were children, heaps of children; presently one of these children came out and held up its arms, and became his property; and he listened to its story as he walked with it, with saddened heart; and presently this child, too, finished its tale and fell back and was lost in the great ocean of its fellows.

There were mothers and wives—thousands of them. Presently one came to him, her baby in her arms, and told her tale, which made his fingers to clench and his teeth to grind together. Then she fell back weeping, and was lost among the waves of faces around her. And another: and another: and another.

Always sadness, always disappointment, always unhappiness: was there then no gladness in this great City?

There were lovers—thousands of lovers, and presently a pair came out, a workgirl and a workman; he listened to their tale and understood that there is one thing always which remains to us, even in meanness and monotony, which is love.

As the visions grew, as the puppets of his fancy became real, so the young man's daily task in the City became more intolerable, and he longed, like a prisoner, for the hour of his deliverance. For he could now think of nothing but the figures which moved perpetually before him, acting and talking before

him as if he had no will in the matter, and as if the drama of their lives was not the creation of his own brain.

You who have never been possessed by such phantoms, you who have never made acquaintance with any but men and women of the flesh, cannot understand the strength of such possession. For they do not leave the brain in any waking hour; they are always present, always acting and talking, always in some way carrying on their lives independently of your own will; they know nothing of time or space; the longer they stay with you the better you know them. Some of the men become your friends: you fall in love with some of the girls. Some of them you hate: you weep over the misfortunes of some, you rejoice with their joy. Yet one thing seems strange, that there is in every one of them something of yourself. They are your own children; even in unlikeness they are like you. These phantoms come only to a few; and of these few there are not many, indeed, who can

describe in fitting terms what they have seen. For the phantoms pay no more respect to dramatic effect, to grouping, to situation, than the man and woman in real life. They act in exactly the same way. Every one of them wants for himself all the joy and happiness that can be crowded into the twenty-four hours of the day; every one desires for himself love, ease, pleasantness, sunshine, long life, and health. Now of all these things there is not enough to go round, by a great deal, and people have hardly as yet begun to manufacture more.

'Allen, my son,' said the Philosopher, 'have you, then, found at last the Voice of the People?'

'I do not know,' he replied; 'I must think.'

'The people have no voice,' said Will bluntly. 'They want to be taught how to speak; they want the power of speech, and they want—not a poet—but a leader.'

'You are right, Will,' said Hector.

'They want,' he repeated, looking at Allen,

'a leader who shall tell them what else they want, and what they must ask for. As for their Voice——' He stopped abruptly.

'Oh!' cried Claire, 'do not vex yourself longer about their Voice, Allen. My father means that the heart of the people is your own heart, when you know them. Their Voice is your own voice, when you have learned them.'

'My daughter,' said Hector, kissing her forehead, 'you have rightly interpreted. Listen, Allen, to your own Voice. Your education, my son, is now complete.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREAT CONSPIRACY.

'TELL me, father,' said Claire, 'now that Allen's education is complete, the other part of your great Conspiracy—that is, if I may be told.'

'You shall be told, my daughter.' Her father assumed his most important manner. 'When I informed you, my child, that Allen should be a poet, I meant more than what you understood. For such a poet as I designed there is a broader future open, a more glorious ambition.'

'Can there be a more noble ambition than to become a poet?'

'The greatest thing of all, my daughter, is to lead the world. There are no longer any

kings; but there are dictators. It is the same thing, but with changed name. Every man who aspires to lead mankind must be ready to assume the purple, if he succeed.'

Claire began to comprehend; but she interrupted not.

'I myself,' her father went on, 'have made my humble attempt. But for the destruction of my poems I might now be—Gambetta. I failed. Yet to have endeavoured makes all the life illustrious.' He paused, thinking of the barricades and of himself a lad of twenty-one, brandishing a gun and shouting for the Republic, which was going to do so much for the world and has done so little. 'It was necessary,' he went on, 'that Allen should be a poet first, as I was. The rest will follow. He knows the people; he knows all that I can teach him. When the moment arrives he will cease to be a poet, and will become a prophet. He will spring to his feet and speak. He will be the leader, dictator, rex, imperator, *servus servorum*—all that there is of most magnificent.'

Claire shook her head and smiled.

'Hitherto,' her father continued, 'in speaking of leaders we have meant generals and politicians. I suppose there must continue to be generals and politicians. But the people will no longer be led by them. I have made up my mind that the people are concerned with one thing only.'

'What is that thing?' asked Claire.

'Happiness, my daughter. The leader of the future, the next dictator, will be the man who will teach the world how to be happy. Politics, forms of government, are nothing. That form of government, that ministry which interferes with the people's happiness must be abolished. Let it vanish!' He swept the air with a wide and comprehensive gesture, at which kings might have trembled. 'Everywhere,' he went on, 'men want to be happy. They cannot. Why? They do not know how. None of their leaders can teach them. A man must be a poet before he can find out for them.'

Claire nodded and smiled again.

'Allen shall be such a leader as the world has never seen. There have been many leaders, but they have failed; partly because they were themselves led by selfish motives; partly because they knew not wither they would lead the people; partly because they thought that a government can do for the people what they must do for themselves. They look, poor fools, to the Government, and the Government looks to them. "Give us," they say, "what we want." "Tell us," the Government replies, "what you do want." Alas! they do not know. And as the leader, so the people. They are ignorant, they are deaf, they are dumb, they cannot think, they suffer, and know not why. They are waiting for the man who will tell them what they want. And, my dear, directly the people find out that, you may be sure that they will have it, whether the Government wish it, or whether they do not.'

'It seems a great dream,' said Claire. But still as she spoke and as she listened a

strange and subtle smile lingered upon her face.

'It is a great dream; it is more than a dream; it is prophecy. Allen is already a poet, and shall shortly be a prophet.'

A vision arose before the girl's mind of a great tall figure clothed in a single robe, with long lean limbs, and one finger pointing upwards. In the right hand was a stick. It was the figure of Elijah as represented in some book of her infancy. She tried to see the features of Allen in this garb, but she failed.

'He must have courage; he must have great courage; he must not be afraid of rough crowds, of hard words; he must fight, if need be. Yet, *ce n'est que le premier pas*, his friends will push him on. As yet, he waits for inspiration. The moment will come, doubt it not. All will go well, Claire; all will go well with my disciple.'

As he spoke, the rapture of his great Thought seized him again; but this time, he

spoke slowly, and with eyes which saw, looking out into the night, a vision.

'I behold,' he said, 'one who comes. He is greater than Voltaire; he is greater than Shakespeare; he is the greatest of all who have taught or led the people. He teaches them how to make life happy. No one has taught mankind that lesson yet. Allen will do it. They shall require of the Government nothing but order and justice: they will rule for themselves their wages and their work and their holidays. They will find happiness for themselves. There shall be no more hunger, no more misery, no more cruelty; there shall be enough happiness for all. To the new Humanity there shall be no talk of Government. The real leader shall be he who can make them happy. Once more, my daughter, this idea of France, the Mother of all ideas, shall be proclaimed. But in this great Revolution before us we shall learn by old and sad experience. There shall be no bloodshed, because all men will work with us when they understand that

we are at last fulfilling the destiny of man, which is to be happy; else why were we born?'

'As for poets,' he went on, 'they are nothing. They are as plentiful as blackberries. Do you think I would have taken all this trouble to produce a poet? No, it was a nobler thought. I would produce a leader.'

'Do you think, mon père,' said Claire, with another subtle smile, 'that Allen will become—what you hope?'

'I think he will,' replied her father. 'I have watched him with sympathy. He is gentle, he is ready, he is full of generous sentiments—*enfin*, he is a poet who has been taught by me.'

'And you believe that he will rise and lead the people?'

Hector had the faith in woman's wit which all Frenchmen entertain. He looked anxiously at his daughter.

'Tell me, Claire,' he said, 'what you mean.'

'I mean, papa,' she replied, 'that there are two boys, and that you have only thought of one. There is a strong boy, and there is a weak boy. If one is to be a leader, it will be the strong and not the weak.'

'And Allen?'

'Allen, mon père,' she replied with just half a little laugh, 'is so weak that he is even led—by me.'

Then her father's face cleared.

'*Allons! allons!*' he said, with a cheerful light in his eye and in the most musical note of his voice, 'all is for the best. Yes: it is a beautiful world. The young poet is led by you, is he? Women lead the world. I keep my hopes.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE PROPOSALS.

When the three young men arrived at the age of twenty-one things began to happen. If things happen at twenty-one they are almost always good things. If 'anything happens' at sixty, it is generally followed by a procession in black. Fortune is a woman, and may therefore only be wooed by the young and comely.

The first thing to happen was that Tommy's uncle behaved as an uncle should—he admitted his nephew to a Share. 'It will now be expected of me,' said Tommy, 'to leave this deserted hole and live in chambers.'

He had developed aristocratic leanings. He had long since discovered the West End and club-land; he used to go there and watch the

members walk up and down the steps of their palaces; he used to let his imagination loose over the delicious wickedness that he imagined to be going on within them—the gambling, card-playing, champagne-drinking, and bacchanalian revels which, as everybody knows, make Pall Mall horrible by day and night for quiet people. He ardently desired to be admitted into this fellowship. The first step must be, certainly, to migrate into fashionable quarters.

The other two remained still in clerkery. But they were advanced; they had been discovered; they now drew substantial pay and did responsible work—young men who know foreign languages are not so plentiful in the City, they command a price. This increase of income brought plenty and comfort to two houses in the village.

'My son,' said Mr. Massey, who was always sanguine, 'will do well; he will go farther even than his father. He may even rival you, Colliber.'

Of course the fiction of glory was still maintained.

'A clear head and a sagacious eye,' said Sir Charles. 'The young man will be a credit to us, no doubt. I hope, Massey, for your sake, that he may rival any of us—any of us.'

'He certainly will,' said Mr. Colliber, grimly, 'if he takes up with any of his father's projects.'

Mr. Massey was not offended, because he believed in his projects. 'The boy might do worse,' he said, 'he might do worse.'

It was somewhere about this time, too, that Claire became conscious of a change in the behaviour of the young men. The old *camaraderie* disappeared; they no longer treated her quite as an equal; little by little they began to observe a respect and deference towards her quite unknown in the old days. Olinthus resumed his visits and even brought gifts. Allen seemed to think that her opinion was worth asking on the only subjects he cared to talk

about. Will paid her on every occasion the *petits soins* which girls like.

Perhaps she would not have wondered had she realised the change which a few years had accomplished in herself. She was now eighteen years of age, and at least three inches taller than her father. She had the sloping shoulders of a Frenchwoman, with the sweet face, delicately coloured, not pale, of an English girl. Her hair was black like the hair of a Parisienne; her eyes preserved the deep, full, limpid blue which seems to belong to English eyes; her voice was low and full like her father's; her features were as sharp and clear-cut as his; the grace of her walk, the little quicknesses of gesture, the delicacy of her fingers, were altogether French. No one but a Frenchwoman could dress so beautifully with materials so cheap and on an allowance so exiguous.

It was no wonder that the young men fell in love with her. The old, who are even more ready to appreciate beauty than the young, were of course in love with her. Sir Charles

made her pretty compliments, and told her how he had received a great many most beautiful young ladies at his Mansion House balls, but none so beautiful as herself. Even Mr. Colliber, who was believed to have no eyes for anything but the price lists, congratulated her father on the girl's beauty and wished himself forty years younger. The lads would have been insensate logs had they not fallen in love. They were not insensate, therefore——

Some girls would have recognised the symptoms—Claire did not. She never thought about such things as love at all. These young men had been her companions all her days; they were her brothers; Will and Allen were part, the greater part, of her life; of course they loved her as she loved them.

Her father observed these indications with discernment. Clearly there was something coming. He remembered the race for the orange, and smiled. Which would Claire accept of the three? He expected that a formal proposal would be brought to himself, perhaps

through the respectable parents. But he waited in vain. The respectable parents did not appear at all. Nor did the young men speak to him. He then remembered that the marriage customs of the English in some respects differ from those of France. Therefore he sat outside, so to speak, and watched.

He observed that Olinthus called twice a week, regularly; that he evidently wished this regularity to be marked as meaning intentions; that he always brought something, such as gloves, fruit, neckties, or flowers; that he laid his gifts upon the table without a word and presently departed after a few attempts at speech; also that Claire gathered up the gifts with a careless hand and tossed them aside when he was gone.

He perceived, next, that Allen and Will were rapidly approaching that stage at which jealousy begins. It was quite customary for them to meet at the Cottage, but now they came every night; sometimes they came together, but often separately.

In a beautiful map which shows the progress of the pilgrim of love, there occurs, quite early in the pilgrimage, *L'Ile des Petits Soins* lying quite close to the *Terre d'Admiration*. It is succeeded by a black and grisly district, horrid with woods and dreadful mountains, as they used to say before the taste for the picturesque was awakened; it is called the *Pays des Jaloux*. Now, all these suitors were engaged among the gloomy defiles and black forests of this unpromising country. Tommy was the first to enter it, and the reason—as it seemed to him, not knowing that it was part of the pilgrimage—was the fact that Claire continued the old custom of walking with Allen in the Forest, sometimes in the evening, alone with him. She had done this for many years, yet the enormity of the thing never occurred to Tommy until he began to consider the young lady as, in the sweet City parlance, his own property.

Tommy did not resolve upon pursuing this affair without great consideration. Before finally deciding upon paying his addresses to

Claire, he surveyed womankind from China to Peru, reckoning from east to west, or as much of that space as he could command, including the young ladies of Loughton, Chingford, Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Theydon Bois, Epping, and even Leytonstone, going to church on Sunday mornings with no other object than the consideration of the other sex. He stood in the porch and watched them coming out, seeing them in this way at their best, with their nicest frocks on and in their sweetest looks. He came to the deliberate conclusion that of all the girls Claire was the prettiest, and the best dressed, and the nicest. He then informed his mother of his design, not asking her counsel or permission, but announcing his will, like the great Bashaw.

'Only a governess, my dear?' she whispered.

'A beautiful woman, mother, in the eyes of her lover is the equal of a countess.' He thrust his hand into his bosom as he uttered this magnificent sentiment, and wished himself a

duke, in order to illustrate it the more splendidly.

'Remember, Olinthus, you are a Gallaway.'

'I do not forget it,' he replied grandly. 'A man raises his wife to his own position. As a partner in the Concern, I already enjoy a position, which I shall confer upon my wife. You may prepare the girls, mother, for the news. I hope they will like their sister-in-law. Tell 'em,' he added, with simplicity, 'if they don't like her, they may go and live somewhere else.'

'You might look higher, Olinthus.'

'I might,' he replied. 'With manner and appearance, and a partnership in a steady Concern, one might look anywhere. But I am satisfied. Give me Claire. My tastes are simple. Of course, as regards her father some arrangement must be come to. He may come to the house once a week or so in the middle of the day, when I am in the City, or on Sunday to dinner, or perhaps supper will do, with a bit

of salad and the cold beef—all that can be easily arranged.'

'Allen,' said Will, one morning in the train.

Allen changed colour because he foresaw that there was going to be an explanation.

'How long, Allen, is this kind of thing to go on?'

Allen shook his head helplessly.

'I've been thinking, old man,' Will went on, 'how to settle it. We can't afford to quarrel, we two. If Claire takes either of us, she must become the other fellow's sister. See?'

'Yes,' said Allen, 'she must be his sister.'

'Very well, then. Now I've been watching Claire.'

'So have I,' said Allen.

'Let us compare notes, then. I say, for my part, that she does not suspect anything.'

'I don't think she does,' said Allen.

'But the time has come for her to be told. Now I've got a plan. We might toss up who

should speak first; but it seems hardly fair to leave such a serious thing to chance. Let us both write to her, and let us send the letters by the same post.'

This was reasonable. Neither, in this way, could have the least advantage over the other, and Claire would learn the truth.

'Of course,' said Will a little bitterly, 'you are the cleverer, Allen, and you have been most with her. She is sure to take you. But I should like to let her know—just to let her know—that I'm not such an insensible ass as not to be in love with her. As for that, I've been in love with her—and so have you—ever since we were children together. There is no one else in the world that I could be in love with.'

'But suppose she won't have either of us?' said Allen.

'Then we shall go on just the same as now. Was there ever in poetry a girl with two lovers who would have neither?'

'Remember, we are only two City clerks.'

'That is nothing. We are going to be rich City merchants. I shall change my name to Whittington. You shall be a great poet as well as a great merchant.'

'When, Will, when?'

'Soon, old boy—very soon; while we are young and can enjoy things. Don't you feel sometimes as if there were ten thousand things wanting to make you quite happy? Claire, to begin with; and then pictures, music, and books, and the theatre, and dancing and singing, and sometimes travelling; but Claire to begin with!'

'And without Claire?'

Will was silent awhile. The light went out of his face.

'Without Claire—nothing. Allen, don't you see how she has been everything to us? What should we have been without her and her father? I tremble, sometimes, to think what we have escaped.'

'Can't we wait a little?' asked Allen. 'Everything is so pleasant. It seems a pity to disturb pleasant things.'

Will shook his head.

'No; the pleasantness is disturbed. You glared at me after church last Sunday. That kind of thing can't go on.'

'As for that, you looked as if you were going to knock my head off yesterday evening.'

'I felt like it,' said Will.

They wrote their letters that same day. First they sat down to the table opposite to each other and resolutely took pen and paper. Then they looked at each other, thoughtfully.

'What are you going to say, Allen?' asked Will with anxiety.

'What shall you say?' he replied.

'If I was a poet—but no, poetry is only for make-believe. Everything real is prose.'

They applied themselves with determination to thought. Neither had any experience in love-letters.

'Allen,' said Will, throwing down his pen, 'it's no use, I can't write it. I can't find words to say. Have you written your letter?'

Allen shook his head. At such a moment,

when he should have found the most glowing words, his brain was barren; the reason being that he was not satisfied with the plain truth, which was in itself full of poetry, and wanted no more gilding than the crown of England.

'The thing is ridiculous,' cried Will. 'Look here: we will write one letter and both sign it.' He seized the pen again and wrote without fine words the simple truth.

'DEAREST CLAIRE,—

'We both love you; that you know already. We both desire, more than anything in the world, to be your husband. But you can only grant that to one of us, and the other must remain your brother. That one will go on loving you as a man loves his sister.

'Your lovers,

'ALLEN ENGLEDEW,

'WILL MASSEY.'

'There!' said Will. 'We have told her the truth in plain words. It is better than any dressing up. We will post this in the City

to-morrow morning, so that she will have it in the forenoon, and have time to think of her answer.'

'But neither of us,' said Allen, 'must go to the Cottage till an answer is received.'

That night Will passed in watchfulness, because he distrusted the strength of the fraternal bond. Would the yearning which had of late possessed him so strongly, to take Claire in his arms and keep her there, cease, even if she were to choose Allen?

His rival slept soundly after thinking how the situation would fall into verse, and fitting some beautiful thoughts which could be put on paper when he found time.

Next morning they met Tommy at the station. They observed that he was fidgety in manner, as if he had something to communicate. He generally went first class, as a Partner should; but to-day he got into a third-class carriage with them.

'I've got to tell you fellows something,' he said, with a very crimson blush.

'Go on, Tommy,' said Will encouragingly. Neither of them ever paid Tommy the deference due to a Partner.

'It's about Claire.' The other two started and looked guilty. 'Yes, about Claire. I think it right to tell you, because you go to the Cottage so often and seem to consider the place your own property, that after to-day you will have to wait till you are invited.'

'Indeed, Tommy! Why?'

'Because I've written to Claire—henceforth Mademoiselle Philipon to everybody except myself, if you please. Remember that—I've written to her, and the letter is in my pocket, asking her—in fact—to become Mrs. Gallaway.'

'Oho!' cried Will—what did they both laugh for?—'And the letter is in your pocket?'

'In my pocket. I've consented to waive the difference in rank, and have offered her—my hand.' He held it out, a white, fat hand, with the same expression upon it as upon his face. Everybody knows this peculiarity in hands. It was a carefully groomed hand, too,

with three rings. 'My mother,' he went on, 'is going to break it to the girls, and will, of course, call upon Cl—— I mean Mademoiselle Philipon—as soon as she has answered my letter.'

'Upon my word, Tommy,' said Allen, 'you are very good and generous.'

'A Partner in such a Concern as ours might look higher. But never mind. I thought I'd tell you both, because we are old friends, and because, you see, when a man's engaged, he can't have other fellows hanging round his girl.'

'I see,' said Will. 'It was very considerate of you to tell us. And now, Tommy, one good turn deserves another. So you must know that Allen and I have both written to her as well, and made precisely the same offer. We all start fair.'

'You've written, too?' Tommy turned very red.

'We've written, too. Claire—no—for you, Mademoiselle Philipon—will get the offers of all three at the same time.'

'I call this,' said Tommy, in a great rage, 'confounded sharp practice.'

'Why?'

'Because you must have known that I meant business. Do you think I have been going there three times a week to have the pleasure of hearing her father talk French? You must have seen it. Anybody must have seen it.'

'If,' said Allen, 'I had seen it, I should only have written or spoken sooner.'

'Cheer up, Tommy,' said Will. 'Perhaps Claire saw it, and that is, you know, the most important point.'

Tommy sat glum and sulky—his friends, he felt, were not afraid of his rivalry—till the train arrived at Liverpool Street. Then he got down with dignity and went straight to the nearest pillar post, into which he dropped his letter.

He really felt very much hurt, and seriously alarmed, because it never had occurred to him that the other two should also 'mean business.'

In the course of the day, however, he took heart, thinking that he was a Partner and they were only clerks; also, that Allen might be a good-looking fellow enough, but he was lanky and wore glasses, and that Will was certainly too big a fellow to take any girl's fancy.

Claire received the letters when she came home from the school. She read them, and her heart began to beat and her lips to tremble. Because she felt, somehow, as if she loved two of them in exactly the same way. As for the third, she neither blushed nor trembled when she read his letter. She put it down gently, however, and smiled.

When her father came in from the garden, she gave him the letters without a word.

'Does my daughter wish to leave her father yet?' he said.

She laid her arms about his neck and kissed him, with a tender love in her eyes.

'What answer shall I give, my dear?' he asked.

'I don't know.' She blushed and hid her face on his shoulder. 'I have no answer.'

'Allen? Will? Olinthus?'

She made no reply.

'Shall I send an answer, Claire? Shall I bid them wait?'

'Oh! yes. Let them wait.'

'I mean for a certain period, dear. We will give them a little time to prove themselves. Will is certain to succeed if he gets a chance. Allen will be a poet. Olinthus will be an alderman. Let them wait.'

He saw two of them and wrote to the third. To Allen and Will he said that they were bidden by Claire to supper the next evening, and at the supper they should have their answer. To Olinthus he said that no father could receive an offer of this kind without emotion. Would he, in person, receive Claire's reply? If so, a supper awaited him at nine o'clock, after which he should learn her decision. Meantime, let him bring to the supper, which was to be a banquet worthy of so great an occasion, a heart of joy.

'A banquet, and a heart of joy.' There could be no doubt, thought Tommy, of the reply.

'I suppose, mother,' he said, showing her the letter, 'that we may consider the thing as good as settled. After all, I doubt whether I've done the best for myself, eh?'

'It's a great honour for her,' said his mother. 'And I only hope she will show that she feels it, and not give herself airs.'

'Yet she is, you know, really and truly, mother, a most beautiful girl. Isn't she now?'

'I am not denying her good looks, Olinthus. But *my* son should have got something better than good looks. An heiress, Olinthus, I had hoped for.'

He smiled and stroked his chin.

'It would have been pleasant to have married an heiress. Yet, what heiress could be half so beautiful as Claire? In love, mother,' he said grandly, 'we despise fortune, and think only of beauty. Think of that girl dressed as she ought to be. Oh!'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BANQUET.

If the young men brought to the banquet the heart of joy which had been recommended they dissembled. There were no signs of joy at all among the little group upon Hector's lawn the next evening, but rather of constraint and embarrassment. They spoke little, and nobody seemed to pay attention to what was said. M. Philipon wore his whitest waistcoat and his finest rosebud, and received the three young men with the cordiality of one who bestows, as well as receives, honour. He was, however, fully alive to the responsibility of the position, and felt that he had a serious speech to make, and that it was due to his daughter that the speech should be expressed in fitting

words. Claire did not appear. Could it be that they were going to have the banquet without her? As for the young men, Will and Allen stood together, Allen with one hand on Will's shoulder, as if for support. Olinthus stood apart from the others, wearing a smile of assurance which now and then gave place to a look of anxiety. He was dressed with great splendour, wore all his rings and chains, and had the shiniest of hats.

Just when the constraint and the silence became painful there appeared in the porch a little serving maid, with a white cap and a long white apron, very neat, and appropriate to the Cottage.

'My friends,' cried the host, 'supper awaits us. Permit me to lead the way.'

He led them into the house. They found that Claire was waiting them. She was dressed in some sort of creamy white stuff with a ribbon round her neck and a white flower in her black hair, and she looked so sweet, so dainty, that Allen choked, and Will turned pale, and

Olinthus red. She bowed to them without offering her hand or raising her eyes; and then she took her father's arm.

'Gentlemen,' said Hector, 'on this occasion I lead my daughter to the banquet.' If she had been a duchess and he the Regent; if the Cottage had been the Palais Royal; if the supper had been of royal or regental character, he could not have assumed a more courtly air. The young men followed in great awe and expectation.

'My dear friends,' said their host, 'take your places; let there be no jealousies; Claire sits beside me. Olinthus, you are nearest—take the chair next to her. Allen, my pupil, sit on this side of me. Will, take the opposite chair. So.'

He sat down and looked about him with a truly festive countenance, though the occasion was a grave one. Yet whatever is to come after supper, let the joy which belongs to that meal be maintained. The supper was served on the whitest of table covers and in the

plainest of white china. It took a great number of dishes and in the giver's eyes it was magnificent. Indeed, at first, everybody's breath was taken away by the mere aspect of the spread and the profusion of flowers in which it lay imbedded. No supper, however magnificent, could have made a more imposing appearance.

On the present occasion, there were five tiny lamb cutlets lying on a white bank of mashed potatoes; there was a dish of new potatoes, boiled, another of potatoes *sautés*, another of early peas, another of asparagus, another of cauliflower *au gratin*, another of spinach served with eggs and butter. There was a dish of gooseberry fool. There was an immense bowl of salad, prepared by the hands of Claire herself, there was bread *à discrétion*, and there was a little plate of cheese. Everything, in fact, except the cutlets and the cheese and the bread, had come straight from the garden.

'My friends,' said Hector joyously, all his

embarrassment gone as he surveyed this royal supper, 'this is magnificent, it is superb, it makes the heart rejoice'—he looked round the table—'where, but where is the wine? Hein? Is it possible? I had forgotten the wine—aha! the wine to make us merry. Behold the bottle'—he could reach it from the sideboard without rising from his seat. 'Aha! the Divine Bottle! the glou glou of the bottle!'

He handled the bottle as lovingly as if it contained a liquid more precious than words can express. He held it up to the light, held it carefully, so as not to shake it, and inserted the screw as an angler sticks on his worm, as if he loved the cork. Then when, with a voluptuous pop the cork left the bottle, M. Philipon laughed softly, and placed the Divine Bottle beside him, wagging his head and forefinger at it as if it, too, were a boon companion. Two of the young men knew the wine well. They were perfectly acquainted with the resources of the cellar, and they both looked straight before them as if fearing to meet each other's

eyes. Only from Allen, who was imaginative, a faint shiver escaped with a whispered trembling of the lips as if caused by the rolling of a few r's.

'Supper,' said their host, a spoon in one hand and a fork in the other, 'supper, like all good things, is a French invention. I do not boast, my friends, I merely state a fact. No one knew what supper could be before the time of the Regent—the first man of modern times who understood how to live. We will imagine ourselves—for this evening only—in the time of the Regent; we will feast like him, we will talk like him—that is, at a respectful distance; we will dismiss the lacqueys and servants'—he spoke as if his one little maid was a complete staff—'and we will wait upon each other—that is, we will wait upon Claire. My dear, let me find for you, among all these cutlets, the sweetest, the best cooked, the most delicious.'

It would have been impossible for the most generous of hosts, had his eyes been turned upon Olinthus at this moment, to escape the

discovery that he was counting, with a disappointment impossible to be concealed, the number of cutlets in the dish. There were five —one apiece; as for the rest, he had now discovered that it was nothing but salad and flowers. And he had been invited to supper, and he had been promised a royal banquet, and he had taken only a slender meal in the middle of the day in order to do justice to that banquet. One lamb cutlet—with salad! The other two, however, were not disappointed: they knew what to expect. To M. Philipon a cup of chocolate was a large early breakfast; a cubic inch of beef stewed in a mess of onions, carrots, and potatoes made a midday *déjeuner*; a *croûte au pot*, with another inch of beef and a dish of lentils or beans, made a substantial dinner. This supper, with its festive array of dishes, its variety of vegetables, and the presence of his guests, was to him a veritable feast of Belshazzar. They wondered not, but yet they trembled, because they must needs pass through the ordeal of the wine.

Their host urged them to superhuman efforts, and congratulated them on their prowess, as if a whole lamb cutlet was in itself a feast worthy of an alderman. The young men, stimulated by these exhortations, went on eating until there was not a stalk of asparagus, or a single potato, or a morsel of cauliflower.

'Go on, brave boys,' cried their host, with glowing eyes. 'The English are as valiant at the table as on the field. They are lusty feasters. Allen, another potato. Will, more spinach. Olinthus, you spare the cheese. It is good to see these young athletes. It is Achilles, with Ajax and Diomede—brave Diomede; no doubt he greatly resembled Olinthus. It is a Homeric banquet, or—yes, it is the Centaurs feasting after a fight; or, still better, it is the suitors of Penelope feasting in the Palace of Ithaca. Desist not; eat as valiantly as Friar John; drink as deep as a Franciscan friar. Allen, the bottle stands by you; let it move on—let it trot—let it gallop. Olinthus,

fill up, fill up all; let us drink like the good folk of Chinon; let us drink without stopping, except to eat.'

With these rollicking and Rabelaisian exhortations did M. Philipon stimulate the revellers and astonish his daughter, who saw, to her amazement, the bottle fly from hand to hand and the young men pour continually more wine into their glasses. They poured as little as they could, and it seemed as if the bottle never would get finished. When you added water to the proportion of three to one, you practically disguised the sourness of the wine, though you made the water thin. At last Allen, who could bear the thing no longer, and who trembled lest Tommy should say something that would annoy their host—indeed he was beginning to look dangerous—poured out all that was left into his tumbler, and heroically drank it off at a gulp. Claire looked in terror to see some of the signs of intoxication. The young men might, if her father went on plying them with strong drink, roll under the table, or have to

catch each other by the shoulders as she had seen men do in Epping Forest.

So infectious, in fact, was the gaiety assumed by their host at this imaginary feast that two of the three guests were presently quite carried away by it, and laughed and talked as if the potency of the wine had indeed mounted to their brains and unlocked their tongues. The gravity of the occasion, the importance of the decision that was immediately to be announced to them, seemed forgotten. Allen, for his part, brandished his glass in sympathy when his host flourished the bottle over his head and quoted the old French song—

> Je ne quitterai jamais ma mye
> Tandis qu'elle fera glou glou :
> Je ne quitterai jamais ma mye
> Qu'elle ne soit vuide de tout.

As if the wine was of the most rollicking kind, and charged with mirth and song and revelry. And Will laughed approvingly.

Claire, for her part, knowing why the young men were bidden to the feast, and

remembering what was about to be said to them, and what hopes were to be destroyed or postponed that evening, felt pained at the exhibition of gaiety, and wondered how men can be so light of heart and so careless even when their own happiness—if they are truthful—is at stake. Claire was not experienced in the heart of male man, else she would have known that the excitement of expectation, of suspense, of a deed done or yet to do, is strangely akin to gaiety. When Oliver Cromwell signed the death-warrant of the King, he fillipped his neighbour with the ink. Not out of frivolous light-heartedness, if you please, but as a relief to the heaviness of his heart. These young men at least were profoundly anxious, and when Allen Engledew brandished his glass like a mad monk of Medmenham, it was because he was unconsciously seeking refuge from trouble in merriment.

This explanation is intended only for metaphysicians, and for the seekers after that which cannot be found.

Claire wondered, but she said nothing and was silent, keeping her eyes down and anxious for the time when she might leave the table.

Olinthus, it may be observed, responded only partially and with effort. He was too hungry to laugh, and, besides, he saw nothing to laugh at. Being asked to drink vinegar and eat salad when one was raging with hunger seemed to him like going beyond the limits of legitimate mirth.

When there was nothing more to eat, and even the bottle was at length happily empty, their entertainer began to wink mysteriously and to shake a finger with a meaning wink.

'Good Heaven!' thought Tommy; 'what is he going to give us next?'

But his spirits were raised when he remembered that French people frequently finish their banquets with a *gloria* or *chasse-café*. 'Brandy, I hope,' he murmured.

'On this occasion,' said M. Philipon, 'which is remarkable, I produce a bottle of remarkable wine; a veritable *grand vin*, a Margaux of

premier crû. It is as old as Claire, and was enclosed in this casket of glass the very year in which she was born.'

He drew forth, from some secret recess, a small pint bottle covered with dust. This he uncorked with immense ceremony.

'Claire, my daughter,' he said, his bright eyes softening, 'we have feasted and we have laughed in your honour. Woman is the giver of all joy: therefore we do well to be joyful in her honour. This day, my dear, you have attained your majority. You are of age, not because you are eighteen, but because these young gentlemen have become your suitors. We shall drink, my best of daughters, to you!'

He filled four glasses, which proved to be exactly the measure of the bottle, and passed one to each.

Then all stood up, glass in hand.

'Claire, my child!'

'Claire!'

They drained their glasses and set them down; that is, three of the four men did.

Tommy set his down unfinished with a gasp and a shiver: for, alas! the vaunted wine had been kept too long, and it was even more sour than its predecessor.

Claire looked from one to the other with a smile of thanks, and then, blushing violently, rose from her seat.

'Yes, child,' said her father, 'I will not say in your presence what I have to say to these young men concerning you. Leave us, my dear.'

He held out both his hands, drew her towards him, and kissed her gravely on the forehead. Then, still holding her—

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'before Claire goes, you may each of you—yes—her father permits so much—you may kiss her hand.'

Tommy, outraged by the last glass of claret, thought this permission, being of a hollow and Barmecide character, was only a natural ending to a banquet from which he rose more hungry than when he sat down—one lamb cutlet and a pint of vinegar! He had no desire to kiss

Claire's hand; he wanted to kiss her lips; as for a girl's fingers, anybody might kiss them that pleased. Still, to refuse might be misunderstood, and if he was expected to enjoy the privilege, he must pretend. He therefore hastened to be the first to lift her hand, and imprinted a kiss with as much fervour as he could. Allen, for his part, blushing as much as the girl herself, bent respectfully over and touched the fingers with his lips, murmuring a few words. Will did not bend more than was necessary, but he looked at Claire while he raised her hand; and he was rewarded by a shy and troubled look, as she lifted her eyes for a moment.

Then she was gone, and the time was arrived for the speech to be made.

M. Philipon invited his guests to resume their chairs and presently began:—

'Gentlemen, you know why I have called you here. You will appreciate my desire in proposing that before entering upon the subject, at once so delicate and so important, we

should all feast together as good friends and *bons camarades*.' Here Olinthus dropped his eyes upon his plate, where yet lingered the bone of the single lamb cutlet. 'Now, then, that our hearts are glad with old wine'—nobody smiled: on such a subject a smile might have been misinterpreted—'we will approach the subject which is in our minds.'

'It is the English custom,' he went on, 'in affairs of the heart, to address one's self first to the young lady. In France we arrange these things differently, perhaps more simply, perhaps with the effect of producing fewer mistakes. That is nothing; I bow, gentlemen, to the English custom'—he saluted the three with a comprehensive sweep. 'You have followed the method adopted by your compatriots. I accept it. And I thank you for the honour you have conferred upon me and upon my respectable family.'

He paused here, and sat down in order that these words might produce their full and desired effect, and they all three bowed. Then

he rose again, and placed his left hand in his bosom, behind his white waistcoat, reserving his right for gesture. But remark that a well-educated Frenchman does not greatly gesticulate. A Frenchman in a rage or a Frenchman carried away by the passion of indignation or contempt may use arms and hands in a fine freedom and frenzy, but not, if you please, a dignified *père de famille* who is calmly discussing the future of his daughter.

'Gentlemen,' the speaker continued, 'it is my duty to inform you, at the outset, that the *dot* of my Claire is—is—in fact—not worth mentioning.'

Here they all three murmured and spread out their hands and bowed and blushed, and Olinthus made some remark about things being enough for two.

'I know,' the speaker went on, 'the wonderful English custom of marrying a wife without any *dot* at all. Droll manner! It is the husband who finds the *dot*, in the shape of an insurance on his life. The insular prejudice

against economy is nowhere so strongly shown. You refuse to save anything. You insure. You trust to your strong arms. It is a valiant nation indeed, where the fathers give nothing to the bride, and the bridegroom has nothing, and both are rich—in the future. A brave people, truly! Yet, gentlemen, I love the French custom best, and I would that it were in my power to give my Claire the *dot* which she merits. Then would her husband be truly rich. As for myself, you have probably heard that the events, known to all the world, which drove me from my country, shut me out from the honourable career in which I should have grown rich. I do not accuse my fate. I am one of the martyrs of France. It is sweet and decorous for your country's sake to be a professeur of French in an institution of demoiselles.'

Here he paused again, and here Will lifted up his voice and begged him not to let the question of the *dot* weigh upon his mind at all, because they loved Claire without any thought of money.

'Brave young men!' said her father. 'You would, perhaps, insure.'

Olinthus said that so far as a policy of a thousand might go he should be most happy to meet M. Philipon's views.

'Gentlemen,' M. Philipon resumed, 'the family to which I belong has long been honourably connected with the commerce of my country. My brother still controls the vast establishment formerly directed by my father and my grandfather. It is a *magasin de literie*, a storehouse of—eh—of beddery. In beddery my ancestors have been for three generations of the first force. Remark, gentlemen, that I pretend not to illustrious birth and claim no great ancestors. We are of the people—like yourselves.'

They nodded their heads gravely. They were not themselves in 'beddery,' but two were in silk and one was in oil, and there is not much difference what you are in, provided you are deep in it, up to your neck in it; with room to plunge about in it; in it 'in a large way.'

It is not everybody who can speak of controlling a vast establishment. Words do not convey the same significance to all hearers, nor did the young men suppose that the vast establishment was but an ordinary shop.

'My daughter,' the Frenchman went on, 'has received from every one of you, and almost at the same time, which shows that you were each anxious to be first in the field and jealous of the others, an offer which not only confers honour upon her, but also upon yourselves. Because, my friends, it shows that the young men who have been my pupils and friends for so many years are fully sensible to the charms of a girl who is as good as she is beautiful. Her mother was an Englishwoman. When I think of that fact and remember her virtues, I would have my daughter, too, all English. You are young men, I confess, of great worth and of much promise, but, boys, which one of you—I ask—is yet worthy of my child?'

Upon this Tommy remarked, with a little

cough, that he knew it well and had felt it; but he trusted that, with the income which he now hoped to make, having been recently admitted to a partnership in the Concern, not to speak of the insurance he was ready to effect, it would not be long before he could prove himself worthy of the young lady.

Allen said that he desired humbly to acknowledge his full sense of his own unworthiness.

Will, with a little thickness in his speech, most certainly not due to the claret, said that nobody could be worthy of her, but he would do his best for her, if—— And here he stopped.

Monsieur Philipon bowed gravely to each.

'It is well spoken,' he said, 'and every one according to his heart. So that, gentlemen, you will not be surprised or offended at my reply on behalf of my dear Claire. You all love her, I suppose. Then, gentlemen, prove it by waiting and working for her. I give you three years. You are all about twenty-one

years of age. You shall have Claire's answer —from Claire's own lips, not from mine—when you are twenty-four. I do not tell you to go away and see her no more for that space of time: I do not ask you to desist from your visits, my dear young friends. I could not think of inflicting so great a pain upon myself as to see you no more all this time. Whether you go or whether you stay, ask again in three years' time, if you are then in the same mind. Claire, meantime, will wait. It will be well if during this time you do not—hein?—talk of love—make eyes of sheep. You will very likely forget her. You will go away and forget her. You are young. Youth is the time of hasty loves and quick forgetting.'

'Oh! oh!' they all protested.

'Again, by the time you are twenty-four you will possibly be more awakened to the blessings of a *dot*, and may repent of an engagement with a penniless girl.'

'Oh! oh!' they all protested.

'You live, gentlemen, in a village where

the talk is of the money which has been lost; you work in a city where the talk is all of the money which may be made. The atmosphere everywhere is filled with the perfume of bank notes, shares, bonds, and coupons. You breathe this air—it is like a slow poison to some'—he looked at Allen—'like the keen mountain air, which stimulates, to others'—he looked at Will—'and like their own native air to others'—he looked at Olinthus, who smiled and bowed and felt that the highest compliment had been paid to him. 'So, gentlemen, I have finished. In three years Claire shall, if she then pleases, bestow her hand upon one of you. I hope that she will give it to the most worthy among you. Gentlemen'—here he became very grave—'if during this period you live well—as young Englishmen do sometimes live—this child will remain to you, and become more and more to you a goddess worthy of all worship and reverence. If you live not well, she will become quite a common woman, a wild flower, of no use except to be plucked and thrown

away. Remember that the *chevalier sans reproche* makes the truest lover.'

He finished: he sat down: he rested his head upon his hand, and looked gravely upon his friends. *Dixerat:* he had spoken.

Will Massey made reply, simply.

He said, 'We thank you, sir. Perhaps we could expect no more. We are young men with all our work before us. We will respect your confidence in us and take no advantage.'

'No advantage,' echoed Allen.

'Three years!' murmured Olinthus.

Then they rose, wished their host good-night, and so out into the twilight of June, where the moon shone on the Forest, turning greys and browns into blacks and whites, and in the soft air the foolish cockchafers were buzzing about and getting into people's whiskers.

'I say, you fellows,' said Tommy, when they were well in the road, 'what do you think of it? Impudence, I call it. Nothing short of impudence. For what is he, after all? A common French master. Without a rap.'

He leaned against the palings and waited for a reply.

'What do you say, Allen?' asked Will.

'Three years!' Tommy went on grumbling. 'Three whole years! Why, in three years a man might be in the Bankruptcy Court. Most likely he would if he stayed on in a hole like this, which reeks of bankruptcy. Three years!'

'Why,' said Allen; 'three years is not such a very long time.'

'As for me,' Tommy went on grumbling; 'I want to go away and live as a gentleman should—in Chambers. But if you two are going to hang on here, and take advantage behind my back——'

'We promised to take no advantage,' said Will gravely.

'Oh! yes, I know. You won't fall down on your knees to her. But as for you, Will, you will be in the garden working for her, making her things, and Allen will be bringing her books, and unless I am to be out of it altogether I shall have to stay here too.'

'Well, Tommy,' said Will, 'you can't expect us to go away just because you want to live in Chambers.'

'A gentleman,' said Tommy, '*can't* live here. It is not possible.'

'Allen and I are only clerks yet,' he replied. 'Time enough, later on, to consider the manners and customs of gentlemen.'

Just then Allen spoiled what might have been an interesting discussion on the manners and characteristics of the British gentleman by suddenly bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

'What's the matter, Allen?' asked Will.

'Did you—did you—' he gasped, at length —'did you see Tommy's face when he had eaten up his cutlet?'

Then Will began to laugh, and Tommy grew hot and angry.

'He had had no dinner—on purpose,' Allen went on, 'to enable him to eat more supper. Ho! Ho!'

'I don't see what you are laughing at,' said

Tommy. 'I call it an imposition to promise a supper and give a man a lamb cutlet and cabbage with vinegar to drink, and to go on all the while like a Tom Fool at a fair about feasting and drinking.'

But the other two continued to laugh.

'And as to unworthiness,' Tommy grumbled, 'we read stuff like that in novels. But, you know, it is downright rubbish. That's not the way that practical people—people in the City—look at things. A good-looking fellow'—he held out one foot and his eyes fell complacently along the leg—'*with* a good position and an income'—he hoped his friends would not be hurt in their feelings by this remark, but he desired to assert the truth, and he certainly was a Junior Partner—'is fit for any girl. Sentiment does not go down in the City.'

'Never mind, Tommy,' said Will. 'I think, Allen, that we were right in having an explanation. It wasn't right of us to begin to be jealous and distrustful of each other; and we ought not to have expected M. Philipon to de-

cide for any of us. Why, Jacob served seven years, and seven years more, for Rachel. Can we not serve three for the chance of Claire?'

'And we are twenty-one, Will. And Jacob, if you come to think of it, was seventy-eight when he began to serve for Rachel.'

'Here's more rubbish,' said Tommy; but whether he was thinking of Rachel or Claire, of Jacob the Patriarch, or of Will the Youthful, did not appear.

CHAPTER XV.

BIVER'S LEGACY.

Who would have thought, when Biver began to take the brandy bottle to bed with him, that the whole future of two English lads would have been affected by so simple an act, so common, too, in thirsty climes? Such a natural accompaniment to so many colonial careers!

When Biver went out to Shanghai as representative to the House of Brimage and Waring, he was not a thirsty young man at all; he was, on the contrary, a young man who held strong moral objections to thirstiness except at tea-time, and was great in commonplace about the ruin caused by drink. He was, in short, one of those young men who regard speech as merely a vehicle for the commonplace, and the

brain as devised merely for learning the commonplace. There are a good many such young men, not only in the City but outside it. It was partly because Biver was so good at commonplace, both commercial and moral, that he was sent out. Yet, sad to say, in five or six years Biver had actually arrived at taking the brandy bottle to bed with him, and the meal called tea existed for him no longer.

That was the beginning of the end. It mattered very little so long as Biver went to bed drunk and got up sober; a man may go on so for a great many years; but when Biver began to go to bed drunk, and to get up drunk, and to be drunk all day long, he entered upon a path which quickly leads to deterioration of the finer instincts of business.

I do not know exactly what it was that Biver did at last; it was something which not only broke the camel's back, but made the cup run over, and, at the same time, put all the fat in the fire. I believe he sat down and began to buy right and left all the silk in the market

at five-and-twenty per cent. above its possible selling value, just as if he had been representing the Government of England instead of a mercantile firm. This magnificence was stopped by telegraph before he had lost many millions, and he was deprived of the power to do any more harm to the Firm. Biver was ordered home; he hugged his brandy bottle and went on board the next mail. But he had either overrated his own strength or underrated the strength of the brandy, and when the ship was still in the Narrow Seas he had to be dropped overboard, while the passengers stood in a semicircle and the captain read the service, and the youngest steward cried aloud, using one of the ship's napkins for a handkerchief, not because he loved and lamented the deceased at all, but because it was the first time he had seen the handiwork of Death the Conqueror.

This is the tragical history of Biver, and, indeed, of many a gallant youth who seeks his fortune abroad.

And this is the reason why Brimage and

Waring wanted a new representative in Shanghai.

The partners considered their office and its occupants, and their eyes fell upon the two lads. They were both of good character; they both knew two modern languages; they were handsome young men, of good bearing and good address, presentable anywhere. It does a house good to be represented abroad by young gentlemen of pleasing manners.

But they only wanted one, and they hesitated which to take. For the appointment, though it led to such risks as that which proved fatal to Biver the bibulous, was great promotion; a handsome salary was attached to the post; there was no telling what might not follow—even partnerships had followed—for successfully representing the House in Shanghai.

The partners finally decided on Allen. He was intelligent, though perhaps, they thought, knowing nothing about the poetry, not so intelligent as the other lad; he could be safely trusted to carry out instructions with discretion,

which means, in commercial matters, with alacrity in perceiving when disobedience is best. Moreover, which finally decided them, he was the son of an old servant of the House whose unmerited disasters and tragic ending had not yet been quite forgotten.

They sent for Allen: they communicated with great solemnity the decision they had arrived at; the senior partner even began an exhortation on the responsibilities of the position; when, to everybody's astonishment, the young man, who had been blushing painfully, interrupted him with the astounding information that he was obliged to decline the offer.

'Are you afraid to go?' asked the senior partner bluntly.

'Are you unable to leave your mother alone?' asked a junior partner kindly.

'Are you anxious about the duties?' asked another.

'Gentlemen,' said Allen, holding his head very erect, 'I am not afraid to go, and my mother will be very angry and disappointed

with me, at least I fear so, because I refuse the honour of this post. But I cannot go.'

'You have perhaps formed ties; yet you are young,' said the senior.

'Come, Engledew,' said the other, 'we would gladly befriend your father's son; we have offered the place to you because we would help you if we could. Do not trifle with your fortune.'

'I cannot go, sir, thank you.'

'We give you till to-morrow. Go home at once; consult your mother. Such a chance may never happen to you again. Go now, and meet us here to-morrow at noon.'

Allen retired. He went home and told his mother of the offer which had been made him. The widow clasped her hands and began to shed tears of joy.

'I must lose you, Allen,' she said; 'but that is nothing, for your foot is on the ladder at last, and all you have to do is to climb. My dear boy, you will retrieve the name; you will wipe out your poor father's disgrace.'

'Mother,' said her son, 'that is already retrieved; it was never lost. Not a man who knew my father but knows that he had nothing to do with his partner's evil practices. You wish me to wipe out a disgrace which never took place. What has been done cannot be undone; let us cease to make it worse by supposing the worst.'

'But he was bankrupt, Allen, and he committed——'

'I know, I know. Yet there was no disgrace. Mother, I have my own name to think of, more even than the honourable name of my father. I must think of that first.'

'Surely, Allen, surely.' She began to tremble, because her son looked so determined. What did he mean? What was he going to say? 'Your success will be your own, my son; and yet—oh!—doubt not that your dead father will rejoice in it.'

'Yes, mother, if I succeed. But if I do, it will not be'—he laid his hand on hers and

looked her in the face—'it will not be in the City.'

'Not in the City?' She knew of no success possible out of the City. What did he mean?

'No, mother, the time has come—it has been coming a long time—when I can go to the City no more. The work has long been intolerable to me.'

'Oh! Allen, you mean that you are glad to go to China.' But she knew very well that he meant nothing of the sort. 'You mean that you are rejoiced to have a change. Well, dear, boys are so. If you are pleased, I am pleased.'

'I mean, mother, that I am going to give up my post at Brimage and Waring's and that I shall try another line of life altogether. I shall try to live by literature.'

She only understood one way in which money could be made. There were doctors and clergymen, but they did not seem to make any money. The City was the only place.

'Letters? You mean by writing things? But you can't make your fortune by writing.'

'Mother, I am not going to try to make a fortune. I am going to live simply. I shall probably always be a poor man. But I shall try to make a name—and—and to do good work.' His voice trembled a little, because this kind of work seemed to him so sacred a thing—which it undoubtedly is.

'A name—without money? Allen, you are mad. Oh! your head is turned with your book-reading and your writing. Allen! Allen! I implore you. I will go on my knees to you.'

'Mother!'

'Yes, Allen, if you will only give up this wild design.' She wept, she implored; but he was obstinate. 'You are mad—you are mad,' she repeated. 'You will only starve in such a life.'

'I shall not starve, mother,' he said gently, 'and you have enough for your own wants. I shall go to London and make, somehow,

enough for my own. Only do not send me away in anger.'

If he had left her that night, she would certainly have sent him away in anger and bitterness. What was literature in her eyes? What was anything compared to the City? And her boy had the fairest prospects, and he was going to throw all away—the dream of twenty years, that he would 'retrieve' his father's name, and be respected in the City, was suddenly shattered.

In the morning Allen again presented himself before the partners. His resolution was unshaken. He declined the China appointment and resigned his situation in the House.

'May we ask,' said the senior partner, 'if you will give us any reason—what you intend to do?'

'I am going to follow literature,' he replied, with the deepest blush possible.

The senior partner turned his back upon him, and said no more. His time was too valuable to be wasted upon a fool—a mere fool.

One of the juniors asked him if he knew—if he had considered—the kind of life he was about to choose.

Allen said that he supposed it would be a life of poverty and, perhaps, hardship. But there would be compensations.

'What compensations are there?' asked the partner, who belonged to three good clubs, lived in the Cromwell Road, dined every day like Dives, and saw a doctor twice a week, in order to keep himself and his digestion in good order. 'What possible compensations are there for poverty and hardship?'

'Art,' said Allen proudly, 'compensates for everything.'

'Good morning, young man,' said the partner.

In this way did Allen leave Brimage and Waring's, and turned his back upon the City.

Then they sent for Will, and made him the same offer.

He accepted with an eagerness which contrasted favourably with Allen's hesitation.

'You are not afraid to go?' asked the senior. 'There are always dangers in foreign countries.'

'To get promotion, sir,' said Will, 'I would cheerfully go to the Gold Coast.'

'Good. You shall have promotion. If you do well you shall have more promotion. But remember Biver; we must have no more drunkards.'

'I shall not drink, sir.'

'That is also good. I am informed that there is a good deal of loo and baccarat and other games of chance going on out there. We must have no gamblers.'

'I shall not gamble, sir.'

Then they went on to give him instructions. He was to start at once—that very week, if possible; he was to follow certain lines laid down for his guidance; on occasion he was to act for himself. This independent action would determine his future.

'We can trust you, I think,' said the senior partner, watching the young man's resolute look

and quick intelligence. 'Go now. Your outfit will be given you and your passage, of course. Go and begin your preparations.'

.

'So, young man,' said Sir Charles, 'you are going to China, I hear. Money has been made in China before now, and lost. There have been several most interesting failures connected with the China trade.'

'You are wrong, Massey,' said Mr. Colliber solemnly. 'You are wrong; you should stay where the money is. Never go away from the money.'

'And young Engledew, his mother tells me,' continued Sir Charles, 'has positively given up his place at Brimage and Waring's, and means to become a common writing person—a writing person; sad! sad!'

'Deplorable,' murmured Mr. Skantlebury.

'He will not listen to reason. His mother, who has been to me about it, is broken-hearted. Pitiable, indeed,' said Sir Charles. 'A common writing person! After enjoying our society

and actually possessing the privilege of knowing a man of your colossal failure, Colliber. Wonderful!'

'The boy is a fool,' said Colliber; 'let him go.'

'We shall lose all our young men at once,' said Sir Charles. 'That will be a blow. Young Gallaway finds that he must live nearer his office, in order to push the business. There is a lad for you—a freeman of the City, member of a Livery, and an ambitious heart! Massey, hold Olinthus Gallaway as a bright example and pattern. He will be Lord Mayor yet—he will—ha! ha! ha! A noble young man, indeed! But, my friends, I fear we shall not ourselves live to see his bankruptcy.'

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Yes, the evening of the banquet was almost the last that they were to spend together at the Cottage. The last was the night before Will went away. Allen was to go too, and they were all three sad and silent.

'Let us go,' Will said, 'into the Forest.'

They walked, the three—Claire between the two young men—along the well-known broad way of grass, between the trees; they passed the amphitheatre where they had played so many games together and held so many talks; their silent footsteps led them into the leafy lanes where the evening sunlight coloured the green branches above them and the grey trunks and the underwood, and made them all glorious; they came to the place where the old fallen tree lay on the ground. And there Claire sat down and fell a-weeping because both her friends were going to leave her.

'Allen,' said Will, 'you are going away too. Say something to Claire.'

'No, Will,' Allen replied, 'what I have to say is to you. But I want Claire to hear it.' He hesitated for a moment, and then went on with a firm voice. 'I have this to say, Will: You are going away for a long while, it may be more than three years; it may be four or five before you come back. Claire knows that we both love her; and that we shall always love

her—all our lives. But I shall never ask her to choose between us, till the day when we can stand together before her as we do now, and say again what we have already said.'

'Thanks, Allen.' Will held out his hand, but he said no more.

'You are too good to me,' said Claire; 'you think too much of me. I am only a girl——'

'Only a girl!' Allen repeated.

'And you are men—strong men. How could I ever choose between you? You have always been in my heart—both of you—from the beginning. You are always in my thoughts—together. And this is our last evening. Will—dear Will, . . .' She laid her hand in his. He stooped and kissed it, and turned away his head. 'How can we live without you? Write to my father—and to me—and tell us all that you do. Allen will sometimes come to see me. You will rejoice when he succeeds, will you not, Will? And oh! you must not let any thought of me bring a shadow between you. Promise me that.'

They took hands, but neither spoke.

'Now I can do nothing,' she said, 'nothing at all but wait and hope and pray. Come, now, and comfort my father, who will have nobody to talk to except myself. I think we shall talk about nothing at all, every evening, except you two.'

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